Entertainment
Danica: Mom will always be greater than me

World / A10
Al-Qaida group claims Riyadh car bomb attack

Business / B1
IMF upgrades growth outlook for Philippines

Metro
Businessman dies in Pajero blast

Lifestyle
Incredible Jelly Kelly

Itinaya ba ang kinikita ng Pagcor sa halalan!
NGAYONG ALAS 10 NG GABI SA ABC

Oh, my 'gulay,' kids dish out vegetable art!

By Vincent Cabreza
PBA Mother's Lutein diversi

BAGUIO CITY—Oh, my gulay it's vegetable art!

Chinatown Kidal Salcedo's often quoted expression in city on "Oh, my gulay!") gave

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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Pinoy twins are 2 yr old, ready for independent lives

VALHALLA, New York—Carl and Clarence Aguirre, who may be in their last few months as conjoined twins, celebrated their second birthday on Wednesday, scooting around on a mat with other children, clapping their hands to music and resisting requests for birthday cakes.

The other children at Methodist Children's

Bishop hits Pagcor abuse

Gaming firm funds allegedly used for GMA campaign

By Marichu S. Rivera and TJ Burgonio

THE PHILIPPINE Amusement and Gaming Corp., the government's third largest revenue earner, has allegedly spent at least P68 million to boost the candidacy of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Already, Ms Macapagal is facing several disqualification cases for reportedly using government funds in her campaign.

Simpatiko birthday Deon Cruz and yesterday that Pagcor bought 186 motorcycles, 16 multicabs and 30 Ford Ranger pick-ups, all "prominently bearing (the President's) name and undertaking highly visible community projects," shortly before the presidential campaign period began on Feb. 20.

Presenting documents provided by Pagcor employees, Cruz said the state-owned gaming firm also purchased 7,000 truncheons for barangay officials and established water refilling stations worth P4.9 million all over Metro Manila.

Millions have a social objective, which is according to the Pagcor's Charter to use funds for social services, but the timing is a little dubious. Why only now?" he said at a press briefing at the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines compound in Intramuros, Manila.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said Mahukeling would like to read the CBCP complaint first before commenting on it.

Pagcor, which is under the Office of the President, earned P5.41 billion in the first quarter of the year. It generated P20.21 billion in revenues in 2003.

Cruz, former president of the influential CBCP said Pagcor even acts in compliance to administration policies in several of the President's campaign sorties, using Pagcor funds.

NOTHING wrong with the photo, folks. It's just the way it is while sailing along on the Pasig River on any clear day as the murkiness of the water—from the depths curtains. On Thursday various environmental groups navigated the dismal waters to observe Earth Day and call attention once again to the urgent need to restore the black's river of our affections.

Edsa rally gains more supporters

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Michael Lim Ubac

HUGE crowds from the combined forces of various opposition groups have converged to mark the planned massive protest rally against President Macapagal-Arroyo set for May 1, even as Malacañang dismissed it as a despot are aware of low morale for the presidency.

Two of her opponents—Nationalist Jun and Panfilo Lacson—said they would support the move to denounce her alleged misuse of public money for the campaign, but they won't be joined at the gathering soared to be even bigger than the crowds that converged for John II and Edsa III.

Militant groups led by the Bayan Muna party-list group said they would mobilize their forces to stage "Edsa IV" that would gather the four fronts of De Posadas on a giant rally timed with the Labor Day celebration on May 1.

Presidential candidate Raul Sancio political strategist Jaime Galvez-Tan, said the militant Bayan Muna, led by its secretary general Nathaniel Santiago, was on top of the preparations for the rally which would have standard bearers Raul Sancio, Dan Lacson and Eddie Villanueva to attendance.

Tan had said the other day that

17 RP sites are environment hot spots

By Leonardo M. Camacho
Owner-Contributor
on Science/Technology

THE PHILIPPINES is one of the hottest of environment hot spots, according to studies by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies.

The country has 206 conservation priority areas, 17 of which are in extremely critical and urgent conditions—a matter of life or death.

The 17 are the following:

1. The Sierra Madre, which straddles Quezon, Rizal, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Quirino, Aurora, Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela and Cagayan provinces. Legal and illegal logging has been going on in the mountain range since the 1950s. Although the government ordered the number of logging concessions a few years ago, legal and illegal loggers are still at it.

FPJ to do an FVR in pursuit of presidential dream

By Carlito Pablo, Christine O. Avendaño and Norman Bordadora

FPJ will do an FVR.

This was the response aired yesterday by lawyer Ed Serapio, a key supporter of former actor-turned-politician Fernando Poe Jr. ("Former President Poe's 'Kumusta' suggestion on Wednesday that the latter give way to rival opposition presidential candidate Sen. Panfilo Lacson.

In an official statement issued by the FPJ communications group, Atienza said Poe would "not take a lead (from) Kumusta' campaign manual" of 1992, when the ex-general pursued his presidential ambition despite an earlier pledge to support the nominee of his party, the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino.

The LDP nominee was then Speaker Ramon Mitra.

"After his defeat in Mitra, he (Ramos) was badgered to become (Mitra's) running mate, but Ramos broke his word, held his ground and ran. "This is one recurring story that Mr. Poe is aware of," said Atienza, president of the 3 Stars in Enough coalition, spokesperson of the Mitra para sa

A NATION OF CLANS

Filipino political families 'an octopus'

By Luz H. Mabalon, Jr. Editor
and Luigi del Puerta, Intern

THE MAY national elections grew more than ever their politics is still largely a family affair in this country in almost all regions and provinces, politicians and their relatives are vying for elective posts, either seeking re-election or against one another.

For whether in condemning Malaut in Maguindanao backwater, the system still holds all politics is local. Elections are won not by national party organizations but by powerful local families or clans deploying manpower resources of money, machine, reputation and goodwill built up over many decades.

A political dynasty simply means a succession of public office holders who are members of the same family and who pass municipal or legislative seats from one generation to another.

Ricardo Abad, a professor of sociology and anthropology at the Ateneo de Manila University, likens the political clan to an octopus, its tentacles spread as widely as a dominating the body politic.

For once in office, a clan member will work to have other relatives elected or appointed to elective posts in the government bureaucracy so that in no time the clan is manned and the angat set for the next generation to take over.

Eleksyon 2004
SPECIAL REPORT

Northern Luzon: 12 Ortegas running in May

By the PDI Northern Luzon Bureau
Project Editor
Leah F. Mabalon

(For clans, pero)

POLITICS has long been a family enterprise in some of the major towns and provinces of Northern Luzon. No sooner does a person with clan ties of the political kind

Big business groups back GMA

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

THE COUNTRY'S biggest business organizations are rallying behind the candidacy of President Macapagal-Arroyo as the campaign period enters the homestretch and the presidential race appears to be narrowing to two major contenders.

"I would say that a lot or most of the business groups in the country are for the President," Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry executive vice president Donald Dee told reporters yesterday after the President addressed the 36th National Conference of Employers at the Westin Philippine Plaza.

Aside from the PCCI, the business groups that attended the conference were the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FFCCCII), the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (Ecop) and the Federation of Philippine Industries (FPI).

"Everybody is talking about what we will do after the elections, so we are assuming that we are talking in the same president [for the next term]," Dee said.

Before the President delivered her speech, Ecop chair Alfred Ayala told the audience he feel a "yes feeling". He (Macapagal) would be in office longer.

Ecop president Steve Antonio told the President she only had to say the word and the business community would immediately respond to her call for support.

Businessmen William Gatchalian, a member of ousted President Joseph Estrada's "midnight Cabinet," said he was supporting Ms Macapagal-Arroyo because he felt she was doing a good job. "The times are changing and it looks good," Gatchalian said.

Last week, Makati Business Club chair Eleuterio Bonoan, who had a well-publicized riff with the President last year, stated that nearly half of the influential group's members thought the President was the most capable person to run the country.

"In this point, there are really only two main candidates. One aspires to be our leader because he is in the right place... the other makes her claim to another term on the basis of her track record which speaks for itself," Bonoan said in his remarks at an MBC forum on April 15.

Dee said the business groups were throwing their support behind the President not only because of her recent surge in the surveys but because of "the positive developments in the economy and stock market."

FPCCII president Robin Ng said his group had always been for the administration ticket even as it has been "unfair" to its candidates to have to make their court choices.

FFCCCII executive vice president Vicente Chua said he would sense a marked shift in Mr Bonoan, pegged with the recent release of positive economic data and the strengthening of the peso.

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Theresa Ann B. dela Rama	High School	Valedictorian	Maryknoll School
Erika Francine T. Tapiana	High School	Valedictorian	St. Scholastica's College
Fernando M. Magallon	High School	Valedictorian	St. Joseph School
Brittany Anne Pigo	High School	Valedictorian	Lucrecia Kasilag Academy
Freya F. Paca	High School	Valedictorian	Mater Redemptoris School
Charles C. Nepalita	High School	Valedictorian	Colegio de San Pascual Baylon
Phoenix L. Encomienda	Elementary	Valedictorian	Villa St. John Academy
Angelica Beata T. Xabier	Elementary	Valedictorian	St. Therese of the Child Jesus Academy
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Lakas sees silver lining in Ibon poll

By Cynthia D. Balana and Norman Bordadora

PRO-ADMINISTRATION Lakas-CMD strategizers have a curious way of reading the latest Ibon Foundation survey that showed opposition candidates Fernando Poe Jr. and Loren Legarda leading in the presidential and vice presidential races, respectively.

Cebu Rep. Joseph Abellanosa said what the survey actually showed was an upsurge in President Macapagal-Arroyo's ratings and a downward in Poe's.

In the very least, Ibon has said, it indicated a commendable boost in the lead-to-gap between Poe and Ms Macapagal and validated other surveys that showed the President's capability to pull away from the right race.

While the President's ratings jumped from 16.00 percent to 19.6 percent, or by 2.33 percent, he added, Poe's rating slumped by 2.73 percent or from 30.00 to 26.30 percent.

Ibon's conclusion: "There's no way but up for the President. In contrast, Poe is heading for the worst."

Candidate to beat

Pointing out that Ibon Foundation has always been critical of the administration, Antonio Abellanosa did say Rep. Isidro Real Jr. said: "Even the President's critics now recognize that she remains the candidate to beat." On the contrary, "the opposition has been self-destructing through backbiting and black propaganda."

In Ilocos del Sur, presidential aspirant Sen. Panfilo Lacson yesterday stood his ground about dismissing pre-election surveys even after the latest Ibon poll found he was gaining ground.

Unnerved, the senator subscribed to Ibon's analysis that he and Poe should join forces and field just one presidential bet for the opposition to beat the incumbent Ms Macapagal. "There's no need for a survey to know that," Lacson said in the middle of campaign sorties.

He said Poe team scheduled to meet one-on-one for early talks on Monday but nonetheless scheduling kept them apart.

"I'll be in Manila [next] Monday," Lacson said. "I hope we can meet then."

Eddie Gil wants SC to cite Comelec for contempt

By Philip C. Tubeza

CITE the Commission on Elections for contempt, businessman Eddie Gil asked the Supreme Court yesterday for not including his in the list of official candidates for president.

In a five-page omnibus motion, Gil said the Comelec was "supposedly" Chief Justice Jaime Bautista Jr. "should be required to explain why they should not be held [liable] for making a mockery out of judicial process."

He is to take out tomorrow Gil made the claim in P40 Bank SOY in installments. The drafter bank's document is a certificate that he has a P10-billion deposit with them. One such certificate allegedly sent by the bank to the SC became the basis of a status quo order issued on April 14.

Gil insisted that the ruling made him an official candidate again. So why wasn't his name included in the sample ballots already printed? He said Michael Santos, executive vice president of Partido Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa party wrote Abalos on April 15 to request that, "so as well."

The Comelec's reason, in ruling that declared Gil a nuisance candidate had become "final and executory before the candidate supposed his case before the high court."

SC Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban announced yesterday that the court is set to meet on Tuesday to resolve all major election-related cases pending before it.

In a statement sent to the Inquirer, the Dutch bank said "a purportedly certificate of deposit in the name of Eddie Gil dated Feb. 20, 2004 is not authentic, nor was issued by ING Bank N.V. or the Sothern bank."

RP firm creates software to run Windows

A PHILIPPINE-based company Thursday unveiled software that would allow Windows-based programs to run on computers using the Palm Linux operating system.

Peter Wales, chief technology officer of SpoonOps Labs Inc., said his company's software would help millions of users to "bypass" their Windows dependence to the free and open source Linux platform, which he claimed was more reliable.

"With our Install On Linux software... it is as if you have a Windows OS supervising system(s) on your desktop," he said.

Wales noted that one big obstacle to propagating the use of Linux was the massive expense required to create Windows applications users.

Previous attempts to run Windows based processes, like WineWave and other applications ostensibly on Linux machines had been largely unsuccessful and cumbersome, he said.

Asked to comment on the SpoonOps' new software, Microsoft Philippines' spokesperson Mae Rivera told Inter Aksyon Newswire that "We know very little about it... We can only give our assurance when we know more about this software."

Frederick Lowey, SpoonOps' Australian chief operation officer, said the software would be available commercially by the middle of the year.

Lowey, a former member of the US military, said the price of the software, code-named "Daniel," but was yet to be set, but promised it would be "dramatically lower" than Windows.

"Daniel will limit the OS (operating system) dependency, but without, it will free consumers from the bonds of MS Windows, and give them the freedom to use the OS of their choice," Lowey said in a statement.

Carolyn Chase, the company's chief software architect who headed a group that created the Wingdows program, said they had unavailability tested Daniel with several Windows applications.

Since the first Linux was created in 1991 by Linus Torvalds of Finland, its code had been made available for free, provided improvements also were shared freely.

Microsoft and other proprietary software vendors keep their source code pro-tected by patents. AP

New terror threat against RP, other US allies

SEOUL, South Korea—A still pre-claimed "anti-American" group is threatening new terrorist attacks against eight US allies by the end of the month, including South Korea, Japan, Australia and the Philippines, a South Korean official told Thursday.

The group, called the "Stiffled Overseas Organization," warned in a one-page letter sent to the South Korean Embassy in Thailand that it will launch the attacks through April 30, embassy spokesperson Hyun Jung-young told The Associated Press by telephone.

The group described itself as "anti-American" and threatened to attack diplomatic compounds, military and public transportation systems in eight countries that are US allies or have plans to send troops to Iraq. They are: South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, Kuwait and Pakistan.

Ryoo said it was the first time South Korean authorities had heard of the group and were investigating the threat's credibility. The embassy notified South Korea's foreign ministry the Thai government and police, he said.

The letter was received Wednesday and Thai police said they were stepping up security around the South Korean Embassy in Bangkok. It has about 30 employees.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry in Seoul said it had not notified other nations on the list but that it had confirmed that the Pakistan Embassy in Bangkok had also received a similar letter, an official said on condition of anonymity. South Korean diplomatic missions worldwide were alerted to the threat.

The country's National Police Agency could not immediately comment on whether it had stepped up precautions in South Korea.

South Korea plans to send some 3,000 more troops to Iraq, which would make it the biggest coalition partner behind the United States and Britain.

The deployment, pledged earlier this year for the northern Iraqi oil town of Kirkuk, was put on hold amid concerns it would become combat operations in violation of a parliamentary mandate for peacekeeping.

Seoul is now considering two other towns in the southern Kurdish region of Iraq, Sulaimaniyah and Irbil. No timeframe for the new deployment has been announced.

The dispatch was originally scheduled as early as April, but officials say it will be pushed back as the military picks a new site and prepares for the new mission.

Last week, President Macapagal-Arroyo said mounting violence in Iraq has prompted her government to study whether to withdraw its nearly 500 troops from the Mideast nation, although she later said the troops would stay.

Thailand has expressed similar concerns over its 443 noncombat troops in Iraq.

Romania, a close US ally in the Gulf region, was said to be uncertain if forces last year as a staging ground to invade Iraq.

Singapore has a special facility for US aircraft carriers and has been a strong supporter of efforts to fight terrorist groups in the region.

Pakistan has no troops in Iraq but has backed the US-led war on the former Taliban regime and al-Qaida militants in neighboring Afghanistan. AP

We're ready—Ermita

By Alexis Pays
INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—The Philippines is ready to send fresh troops to Iraq, Malacañang said Thursday, but Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the government has yet to receive any warning on the planned attacks nor was it notified in preference to the withdrawal of the Philippine contingent.

Ermita also pointed out that the Philippines has yet to send fresh troops to Iraq, Some 90 soldiers and personnel were sent to Iraq on humanitarian missions since the downfall of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's government, only half of that force still remains in Iraq while the other half is ready to fly to Iraqi if necessary.

In a press conference at his office in Camp Aguinaldo yesterday, Ermita boasted that the Philippines has "vast experience" in handling terrorist threats.

"I'm glad that they sensitive. We are prepared for that. As you know, we have vast experience in that," said Ermita, who also heads an anti-terrorism task force formed by President Macapagal-Arroyo a few days ago.

He added that the defense establishment has yet to receive any warning on the planned attacks nor was it notified in preference to the withdrawal of the task force.

Ermita also pointed out that the Philippines has yet to send fresh troops to Iraq. Some 90 soldiers and personnel were sent to Iraq on humanitarian missions since the downfall of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's government, only half of that force still remains in Iraq while the other half is ready to fly to Iraqi if necessary.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Friday, April 23, 2004
2nd Week of Easter

1st Reading: Acts 9:31-42
Gospel: John 6:1-15

Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, near Tiberias, and large crowds followed him because of the miraculous signs they saw when he healed the sick. So he went up into the hills and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Then lifting up his eyes, Jesus saw the crowds that were coming to him and said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread so that these people may eat?" He said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred silver coins would not buy enough bread for each of them to have a piece."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many?"

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was plenty of grass there so the people, about five thousand men, sat down to rest. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish and gave them as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten enough, he told his disciples, "Gather up the pieces left over, that nothing may be lost."

So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with bread, that is with pieces of the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

When the people saw this sign that Jesus had just given, they said, "This is really the Prophet, he who is to come into the world." Jesus realized that they would come and take him by force to make him king; so he withdrew to the hills by himself.

Commentary:

Sitting on the ground is a symbol of poverty and powerlessness. It means we have no defense of ourselves. We don't often sit on the ground nowadays, and almost never in Mass. But when we are in Mass we are spiritually those disciples in today's reading, sitting on the ground in humility and simplicity, sharing our poverty and lowliness of life sharing the Lord's gift. Miracles were nothing new to Israelites of twenty earlier than John 6. When there is plenty there is no need of miracles! Where there is plenty you don't have to struggle, you don't have to come up against realities too painfully, you just sail your way through with school book. But in the desert these people had almost nothing. There were only five loaves to feed thousands. John says they were barley loaves. This was the cheapest kind of bread, in fact barley was really considered animal food. It is only the very poor who would eat barley loaves.

The miracle is that some kind of abundance came from that poverty. This is not the cruel "gospel of prosperity" that you sometimes hear from radio and television preachers. We, John would be ashamed by such an interpretation. He is not talking about bad wine, but about the Eucharist. Whatever it takes us from any another (grand, self-sufficiency, illusions of grandeur) decides us also to worship and God in spirit.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION—Statutes operate prospectively—The principle is well established that statutes, including administrative rules and regulations, operate prospectively only, unless the legislative intent to the contrary is manifest by express terms or by necessary implication. In the present case, there is no indication that the revised regulations may operate retroactively. Furthermore, there is no express provision stating that it "shall take effect on January 1, 1987," and that it "shall be applicable to all leases written on or after the said date." Being clear in its prospective application, it must be given its literal meaning and applied without further interpretation. Thus, BLC is not in a position to invoke the provisions of Revenue Regulations 12-80 (to lease rentals received prior to January 1, 1987 (CIR v. Court of Appeals, G. R. No. 117323, November 15, 2001) RYAN B. VERA

Can't find precinct? Just text

By Martin F. Manlí

TO HELP prevent confusion on election day, the Commission on Elections has unveiled its "Find Precinct" project.

Using a cell phone, a voter could send a P2.50 text message and receive, also by text, the number and location of his/her precinct.

Although the list of voters has yet to be completed, voters who are Globe subscribers can now use the service. Just type: firstly, space, last name, comma, space, first name, comma, space, middle initial, comma, space, month, hyphen, day, hyphen, year of birth... and send to 2950.

Project head Philip Juico said they are still running test results so the service would be available to subscribers of other providers.

He added that they only have 10 million names in their list. Comelec said there are about 42.5-million voters for the coming election.

Elections Commissioner Melicol Sadain said that the unfilled voters list or 15% to 5% percent complete and it will soon be available in their central files.

The Comelec has been under fire for not running out early with the voters' list and because of reports that it has been unable to procure indelible ink for the May 10 elections.

Meanwhile, the National Movement for Free Elections said the voters' list they acquired for three Manila ha numerous errors.

SUERTRES 3 6 4 (as of 4:00 p.m. yesterday)
SIX DIGIT 6 0 3 4 6 1 (as of 9:00 p.m. yesterday)

METRO

Editor Abelardo S. Manalay

SUPERLOTTO 6/49 2 4 17 21 29 45

POLICE investigators inspect the damaged Pajero van in Kanlaktan, Valenzuela. DANNEBOY

Chinoy trader dies in Pajero blast

By Edson Castro Tatulo Jr.

THE AIR-CONDITIONED van on the car stereo was playing, lyrics rhythm around and ripped and the front portion of the Mitsubishi Pajero exploded, killing a Filipino-Chinese businessman and injuring his driver in Valenzuela City yesterday.

Shards of broken glass also wounded a 38-year-old woman who was just walking near by.

Of trader Peter Dy Sit, died while undergoing treatment, while his driver Jarell Pajarde, 25, sustained minor wounds to his face and arms.

Mary Jane Perez, 37, who had just come from the Karuhatan Public Market, also suffered wounds to her head.

Dy and Pajarde were on their way home about 10 a.m. after dropping by South Supermarket. Pajarde told the heard he did not notice anything unusual.

Dy's wife, Rowena, arrived in C. De Leon Street, the explosion in front of Dy exploded. Witnesses told the police they saw a dark white smoke after the loud explosion.

Because of the impact, all the glass windows of the red Pajero were shattered. The seats and budged.

Impact

But the impact was concentrated on the passenger's seat. The door on the passenger's side almost fell. The compartment up to the car stereo and cooling system were wrecked.

Dy and Pajarde were brought to the Karuhatan Medical Center where Dy later died. Perez was brought to the Valenzuela General Hospital, case investigator SPO2 Jose Bagui told the bosses.

Some of the Circle operatives recovered 16 detonators in Dy's left arm but his family have refused to have the victim autopsied. Dr. Felimon Punzalan, chief of the bureau's main dispatch could have hit Dy in the other parts of the body.

Police also recovered a fuse near Bernardez inside Dy's dark belt bag for a detonator explosion.

Punzalan said it was likely that an improvised pipe bomb was planted inside the front portion of the car, either inside the compartment or in the cooling system.

Bagada, the victim's driver for eight months now, said Dy regularly used the Pajero whenever he went out.

Tension

City police chief Icon Marcelo said Dy's relatives admitted that tension was running with in the family. Last month, one of Dy's children, who was also on board for the Pajero on the time, was abducted but freed after six hours.

Last week, while Dy was preparing to give Baguio City, he discovered that his brake pipes had been sliced. Malabon said.

Northern Police District Director Victorino Ferrer said the explosion could have been motivated by personal grudges. Some witnesses alleged that the big bang was politically motivated but the police refused to confirm this.

Banks urged to install ample security systems

THE NATIONAL Capital Region Police Office will recommend the closure of banks in the metropolis which do not have sufficient security measures.

This said NCRPO Director Rodolfo De Leon days after five armed suspects, including a woman, robbed a bank in Quezon City which was 50 meters away from a police community precinct.

"The bank owners always think about the extra costs. They consider security systems, like closed circuit television and alarm systems, as their last priority," De Leon said yesterday.

Ex- Mendez, the robbers barged into the Asian and Bank on E. Rodriguez Avenue, Barangay Mariana, and carted away about P200,000. The suspects fled by flagging down a passenger jeepney after the 10-minute robbery.

"If the security requirements in our complete, we can recommend the closure of the particular bank to the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas," De Leon added.

He also appealed to bank employees to educate the police immediately during robberies.

De Leon said, as much as possible, the police will not engage the robbers in a bloody shootout inside the bank. Instead, they will wait for the suspects to evacuate the robbers from occupying. Edson C. Tatulo Jr.

Valenzuela, QC not hot spots, say cop chiefs

By Tina Santos

THE CENTRAL Police District director and Valenzuela City police chief have cited food sure the inclusion of their respective areas of jurisdiction in the list of election hot spots earlier identified by the National Capital Region Police Office.

In Quezon City, NCRPO Director Reynaldo Pacaña, flanking Lupi, Tandang Sora, Batasan Hills, Bahay and 10 Campos as among the areas of concern, while Valenzuela Mayor Lito Echale Barcenas Malinis, Ugong and Canumay.

But CPD director Chief Supt. Napoleon Castro said the areas the NCRPO identified as areas of immediate concern neither have history of violence during the past elections nor are they expecting such incident to erupt.

"Wala ng political factions sa malawak kasi wala nang eskwelahan at inilipat na sa ibang lugar. Ang Bahay Toro ay hindi naman ganoon kagulo," Castro said between.

Meanwhile, Mayor Sipi. Jose Marcelo, Valenzuela City police chief, has vehemently denied earlier reports there are election hotspots in his area of jurisdiction.

"The denial followed the ranking of his own intelligence officer, chief Insp. Reynaldo Lumantod, Jr. allegedly feeding the NCRPO the wrong information and without his authority," Lumantod would not be immediately reached for comment.

City Hall workers don new, floral uniforms

By Tarra Quismundo

A VISIT to the Manila City Hall today would bring one to a sight of clerks and secretaries dressed in bright floral blouses.

But their new look is not just because of the mood that came with summertime.

The floral shirts are the new uniforms of female employees, an order from Manila Mayor Lito Atienza Jr. is known to be fond of.

"At first they were hesitant because they were not used to wearing (floral printed blouses). But the others are getting used to it, and they are already accepting it," said City Treasurer division chief Corrie Arandela.

Arandela related that a Valentine Committee, composed of Manila's department heads, came up with the floral design upon Atienza's suggestion.

Before the new floral blouses came, City Hall's department had their own uniforms.

The new uniforms for women are now made of turquoise blouses with large white flowers, and red roses printed with pink and white flowers.

The textile used, imported from Taiwan, was chosen by Atienza.

Two pairs of new blue pants and a shirt complete the uniform set, which cost the mutual clothing allowance of P4,000 each for almost 12,000 office-based female personnel.

"My belief is that you are more productive when you are wearing a colorful attire. It brightens up your day, when you look at the mirror in the morning," said Atienza.

Pig feed spill stalls traffic for four hours

BY ALL the things to mar traffic in Manila, it was pig feed.

Motorists traveling on the northbound lane of the N.H. Lazaro Expressway in Manila yesterday got stuck in traffic during the morning rush due to several bags of pig feed (donut) that littered the flyover.

EPCG Man Sakilatan from the traffic bureau of the Western Police District said the pig feed could have been spilled earlier from a delivery truck.

Because of the spill, motorists were asked to drive under the flyover, causing traffic flow there to be almost bad hours.

Normal traffic flow was restored by 9 a.m., said Sakilatan.

Police, however, were unable to get the plate number of the truck or the name of the driver who supposedly spilled the feed. Sakilatan said their work to set names in the incident.

Barangay tanods, fire fighters and MMDA personnel helped rid the scene of the spilled feed. Mar Lim and Gelo Salazar

Busted pipes blamed for poor water supply

THE DEPARTMENT of Environment and Natural Resources has put the blame on the poorly maintained water pipelines that have worsened the water situation in Metro Manila.

Busted pipes belonging to water concessionaires Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Manila Water Company Inc. also contribute to the rapidly decreasing water supply from Angat Dam, DENR Secretary Elisea Gozun said in an interview.

Gozun said the agency and the National Water Resources Board have alarmed the private concessionaires' regulating agencies—the Metropolitan Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System—to pressure both companies to solve their non-revenue water (NRW) related problems.

Non-revenue water (NRW) is water wasted because of pilferage and damaged water connections.

Maynilad, which is delivering water to the west concession area, has above 77 percent to its NRW level. East concessionaire Manila Water, on the other hand, has about 40.9 percent.

NRWR transaction division Ramon Mendoza said this should be a wake-up call for the MWSS and the two concessionaires, especially now that the water level in Angat Dam has reached a critical point. Christine Cay-Ayson

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NISSAN

Pinoy twins are 2 years old

Front page A1

Hospital were party hats. Carl and Clarence, still joined at the tops of their heads, wore a bandage over their skulls, covering the area where surgeons have been working for six months to connect a tangle of blood vessels into separate circulation systems for brain-starved tissue.

At a news conference before the party, doctors and therapists said the Filipino twins, who live in Rydedale with their mother between operations at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, have been showing that they're ready for separation. One will sleep while the other's awake; one will play while the other cries; and they fight over toys.

"The boys will race each other to get in a toy first," said Julie Imerzel, Rydedale's director of occupational therapy. "If they do get there at the same time, they will play tug-of-war until someone lets go."

Barbara Mitch, the director of physical therapy, said the twins have learned to crawl together to get into a semi-standing position in their cribs.

CARL and Clarence celebrate their 2nd birthday at a children's hospital in New York with their mother Arlene, Dr. James Goodrich and social worker Meredith Goss. —

Months before final surgery

"They're eager to experience the world up-right," she said.

Caregivers also noted that with the help of coordinating nutritious and physical therapy, the boys have made some recent advances. They take off their socks and shoes, they clap hands to "If You're Happy and You Know It."

"Both children are doing extremely well," said Dr. James Goodrich, who heads the surgical team. "No neurological complications or setbacks have developed."

But the doctors, maintaining the gradual approach that was chosen over a single marathon operation, said it will still be months before they can perform the long-awaited surgery that separates the boys. The twins have been through three major operations since October, with surgeons opening windows in the skull area to carefully patch the boys' brains apart and divide the blood vessels between them.

In mid-May, the twins will make their first trip to Montefiore so doctors can measure their blood flow by computer, using a magnetic resonance program at their Irma Medical Center.

After that, the boys will undergo a minor operation to have tissue expanders inserted beneath the scalp over each twin's left ear. The expanders are small sacs that can be gradually inflated with saline to stretch the skin of the scalp, giving doctors room to work with when the skulls are reconstructed after separation.

5th operation may be needed

After the boys heal from those incisions, a major operation, dividing one last major blood vessel, would follow, probably during the summer, Goodrich said. He said he hopes the separation can be completed during that surgery but added that a fifth operation might be required for that, depending on how the surgery goes, especially if there's swelling of the brains.

Because surgeons have cut through different areas of the boys' skulls in each operation, just 3 inches of bone remains to be cut through for full separation, Goodrich said.

Either way, extensive reconstruction of the skulls will be necessary after separation, Dr. David Staffenberg, the lead plastic surgeon, plans to use muscle covering from the boys' midsection to help replace the membrane that covers the brains. The muscle covering, fascia, would then be covered by some of the skin produced by the tissue expanders, Staffenberg said. Bone replacement would be delayed temporarily as the boys recover.

Mother's strength

Dr. Hilliard Mitchell, chief of pediatric pulmonology at Rydedale, credited the boys' mother for their strength and determination.

At less than 50 pounds for the boys, given their medications and is "an integral part of the team," Mitchell said.

"Her smile is as serene to the Philippines with her two boys at her side," she said.

Identical twins

In most cases of conjoined twins, it's taken for granted that they're identical, the product of a single fertilized egg that begins to divide into twins but does so only partially.

But in the case of Carl and Clarence, there was some doubt.

The boys' mother, Arlene, believed they were fraternal twins. Doctors, too, saw the boys' different body shapes and personalities and wondered if they could have been from separate fertilized eggs that combined soon after conception.

"They're very different even though they're attached to each other," said Dr. Andrew Bleiman, a geneticist and the boys' pediatrician, at Rydedale's news conference at Rydedale Children's Hospital. "Carl's serious, Clarence is outgoing and bubbly. They're different in size, they look different."

If it could be established that the boys were not identical twins, it would be the first known case of fraternal conjoined twins, the doctors said. So DNA samples were taken from the boys' skin in Philadelphia, during the latest operation in their separation process.

The tests showed the boys are identical, which is covered in a separate story.

"They're so different in so many ways," Marion said. "It kind of gives you pause to think that genetics plays as little of a role."

"The stress of hospital duties will show its signs on your face.

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Mayor Vi denies FPJ camp permit to rally

By Hai Magsino
PEP Southern Luzon Bureau

LIPA CITY—Don't step on the duties.

This was the stand Mayor Vilma Santos reportedly gave for denying a permit to rally at the city plaza here to presidential candidate and fellow actor Fernando Poe Jr. and his men.

Accordingly to human local rival, mayoral candidate Ruben Umali, "Vivi parents went to Vilma's office three times and were rejected three times. And the reason our parents was rejected was really terrible. The Vilma administration said we might destroy all the ornamental plants in the plaza."

Santos belongs to the administration Lakas-CMD while Poe is the standard bearer of the opposition Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP). They had appeared in movies together in the past.

Umali, the lone KNP bet, added: "We think it was very unfair because the same venue was used by the Lakas candidates on March 27 for their proclamation rally."

Last night's KNP rally was held instead on land owned by former Batangas Gov. Antonio Leviste, the husband of Poe's starring mate Sen. Loren Legarda, in Lemery, Batangas Meanwhile, some four kilometers from the Lipa City Hall.

Scrambling to set business correct at city hall, town events producer Mother Lily Monteverde had tried to convince Santos to approve the KNP's request for a rally permit but the mayor remained firm in her decision.

Santos, however, told GMA-7 News last night she had approved the permit for April 23, but the KNP overlooked its rally for the 22nd, which had been reserved for a fund raising and Earth Day celebration.

The city plaza was the same venue where Loren's twin brother, Conrad, were up the stage and joined the cast of Lubas stage production Sa Dulo Ng Gabi, Legarda'ng Gabi.

The plaza was reportedly part of the P60-million beautification project started in October but was by halfway.

The firemen called the city mayor for her reaction but she wasn't at her office nor did she answer her mobile phone.

For his part, Poe said he knew Santos and she was not the type to do this.

"Hindi gawain si Vilma. Sa hirgis ko, kaanuan na yan sa pulitika. Ayaw ko siguro si Ate Vilma," Poe said. "Pero gawain pa man, okay lang sa amin yan." (Vilma is not like that. I believe it's just politics. She was probably caught in the middle. Anyway it's okay with us.)

With Christine Avendaño

Lito Lapid is off the hook

By Armand M. Nocum

DASMARIÑAS—Investigators yesterday withdrew the graft charges they filed against 69 senatorial candidates and former Pampanga Gov. Manuel "Lito" Lapid relative to the alleged illegal collection of quarry fees in Pampanga.

In a two-page motion, Prosecutors Jesus Mistel and acknowledged the resignation of the case showed that the accusation against Lapid were largely based on hearsay and that it should, therefore, be withdrawn.

"After conducting reinvestigation and/or reconsideration of the case, the undersigned (Mistel) recommended that the complaint filed against all accused be dismissed," he said.

Charged with Lapid were former Gov. Gen. Clayton Oblea, Provincial Treasurer Anita Galindo, Malolos Municipal Mayor Mario Morales, Special Police Officer Renee Salas and several private individuals.

Lapid and other accused were charged with conspiring in 1998 to 1998 in allegedly collect illegal, padded and unauthorized quarry fees and for failing to remit them to quarry operators of the provincial government.

The accusations were contained in an unsigned letter sent to the National Bureau of Investigation in 2000.

However, in his investigation, Mistel found that the complaint did not cite specific cases or proofs and that would contravene the filing of the case.

Milestone for RP eagle: 'Kabayan' soars into the wild

[illegible] carried away the sensitive pair from nest to nest inside the 14-hour-and-eight-minute flight, ignoring the wide open skies.

It took an animal keeper about five minutes to coax him out. But he landed on another palm right outside the enclosure, where he stayed, very still, for quite some time.

And then he spread his wings, all of two meters wide, to commence an excitedly bumpy flight. Finally, he soared over the lush slopes of the country's highest mountain. It was, aptly, high noon.

That did the [illegible]-and-a-half-old Kabayan become the first Philippine Eagle bred in captivity to be released in the wild. Prior to this flight, he had stayed for two weeks inside the Philippine Eagle Center, a specially built enclosure in the Philippine Eagle Nature Park of Davao's Mount Apo.

Kabayan's release, also witnessed by his [illegible] Secretary Elisea Gozun and presidential daughter Luz Veloso, was hailed by environmentalists as a "historic" event, perfectly timed with the celebration of Earth Day.

"This is a milestone," said Carlos Pedroso, president of the non-profit Philippine Eagle Foundation.

50-50 chance

Bred and hatched by scientists and volunteers in the PEF grounds near Davao City, Kabayan—figuring for "compatriot"—has a 50-50 chance of survival in the wilderness, said PEF deputy director Dennis Salvador, interpreted to the bird's chest in a tiny transmitter that would help the foundation monitor his movements.

The PEF said the "unprecedented" release is a preliminary step towards a full-blown program of reintroducing captive-bred eagles in the forests to complement wild eagle populations.

Released to "nationalistic" but, Mob de Leon, is also his handiwork under the PEF's Adopt-an-Eagle Program. The program gives private individuals and companies the chance to become godparents of an eagle for P100,000 a year for six years.

Philippine Eagles, declared national bird in 1995 by then President Fidel Ramos, are [illegible] rare species and grow to be about a meter, at three feet, tall. Only about 500 of the endangered species, also known as monkey-eating eagles, or *Pithecophaga jefferyi*, remain in the country's forests, where deforestation and poaching threaten their survival. The species, which has one of the lowest birth rates, was declared endangered in 1965.

The Davao center hatched two eagles by artificial insemination in 1992, but both have remained caged for research and as a tourist attraction. PEF has been hunting eagles since 1992 and has so far successfully hatched 15 eagles.

After Kabayan's release, the center now has 29 eagles, including those previously caught in the wild, after Kabayan's release. *Jocelle A.R. Ruales and Jeffrey M. Tupaz, PDI Mindanao Bureau, with a report from AP*

Fire prevention chief under fire

By Armando N. Nocum

OMBUDSMAN Simeon Marcelo has ordered the filing of graft charges against the chief of the Bureau of Fire Protection and his finance officer for the alleged "ghost delivery" of about P21-million worth of office equipment and furniture to the BFP.

BFP head Francisco U. Ferrer and finance service unit chief Florante M. Cruz were also found liable for unfaithfulness in the alleged falsification of public documents relating to "ghost" transactions with several suppliers concerning the procurement of BFP supplies and equipment, repair of BFP service vehicles and office equipment.

In a statement, Assistant Ombudsman Emerico Navoa said the two officials were also accused of ordering BFP chief inspector Nestor C. Feliciano to obtain cash advances from "friendly suppliers."

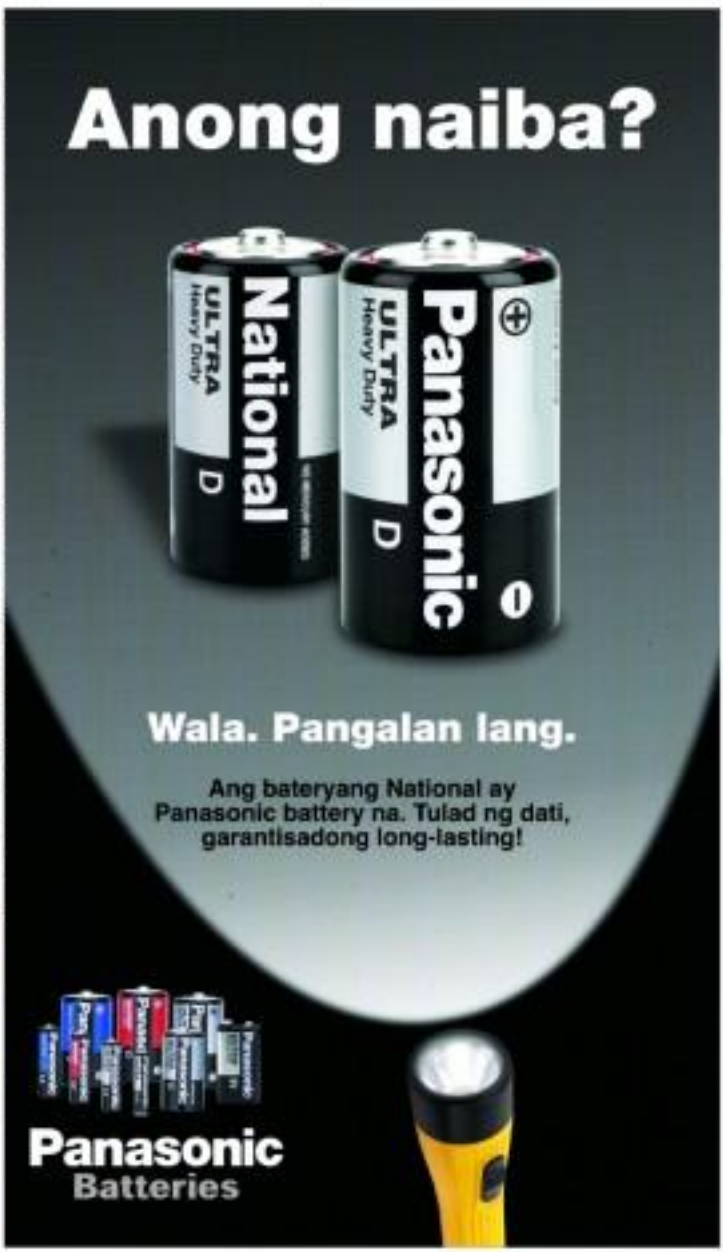
The decision especially ordered Roberto L. Tan, then chief of the BFP supply division, to prepare "rational" procurement documents to match the available supplies of friendly suppliers and to cover up the cash advances received by Feliciano.

Feliciano and Tan were subsequently removed from their posts, prompting them to reveal what they knew to the authorities. They also filed a graft complaint against their former superiors with the Ombudsman.

The alleged ghost transactions included the procurement of personal and office supplies and the never-implemented renovation of the offices of top BFP officials. The supplies were reportedly done without public bidding.

Alpha Phi Beta fellowship

THE ALPHA Phi Beta Chancery will hold its monthly fellowship today at 6 p.m. at The Casablanca Room, Club Filipino, Greenhills, San Juan.



The WORLD

CECILIO LAURENTE B. GARCIA

Al-Qaida-linked group claims deadly Riyadh car bomb attack

DUBAI—Saudi militant followers of al-Qaida claimed responsibility for Wednesday's suicide bombing that targeted a security forces' headquarters in the capital Riyadh and vowed more bombings against government symbols.

A statement by a group calling itself Al Haramain Brigades, published by an Islamist Web site, said the attack targeted special security and anti-terrorism units in the Kingdom, a key US ally and the world's largest oil exporter.

"Al Haramain Brigades in the Arab peninsula succeeded in bombing the command headquarters of emergency and anti-terrorism forces—the terrorist centers of the agents of infidel Saudi government," said the statement in Arabic.

The group said it followed the path of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida group against the Saudi ruling elite.

"Since the terror and noble organization of al-Qaida who follow imam Osama bin Laden, God make him victorious... we promenaded with the war against the crusaders ... are, by God, are dedicating ourselves to fighting you and we will show you the punishment of heaven, uprooting and victory."

In Wednesday's attack, a suicide car bomber destroyed a security forces building, killing four people and wounding 148.

A Saudi official said there was "no doubt" the attack was by Iraq- & Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaida.

The bombing occurred days after a US warning of a possible attack in the kingdom as well as following a slide of Islamist extremism linked to al-Qaida.

Al Haramain, the name of Islam's most holiest sites in the Saudi cities of Mecca and Medina, has previously claimed responsibility for a bomb attack in Detroit, but on a Saudi security officer's car and has vowed to kill any officers barring militants in the conservative Gulf Arab state.

The group promised more bombings.

"This bombing completely decimated the targeted building and killed and injured tens of soldiers and commanders of the criminal, apostate mechanism which is fighting God, his prophet and the faithful," said the statement carried by Qaf's net and Muntada al-Ansar Islamist Web sites.

"This operation, which broke your backs, our hearts, is but one shade of the many shades of pain which we will make you taste, God willing, and revenge by bombings and assassinations and other means shall not stop," said the statement signed by the "mujaheddins' units of the brigades.

Addressing Saudi security forces, the group vowed to avenge the killing of several top militant militants in the kingdom. "We will only heal our wounds through blessed jihad [holy war]." Reuters

MAJOR rescue vehicles are personnel are deployed in front of the destroyed headquarters building of the general security service in Riyadh, following a car bomb explosion April 21. AFP

Saudi envoy denies oil-price deal to help Bush campaign

WASHINGTON—Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, denied on Wednesday that Riyadh had agreed to help lower oil prices to help US President George W. Bush's reelection bid.

There was no "political quid pro quo," he said, stressing that a lower price of oil "is good for the American people, (for) America's economy, for the world economy."

Bandar said he hoped Bush's challenger, Democratic Sen. John Kerry "has heard my explanation about the oil and he can be assured that we didn't make any deal whatsoever to put Kerry in our friend's internal affairs."

The White House has also denied the allegation, which was first in a new book by journalist Bob Woodward that focuses on the US administration's planning for the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Woodward suggested that "Plan of Attack" that Bush had officially promised Riyadh a boost in oil output to drop prices and strengthen the US economy ahead of the Nov. 2 election. AFP

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Islamic conference slams US backing of Sharon plan

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia—US President George W. Bush's backing of Israel's harsh strategy on the Palestinian territories could "wreck the entire peace process in the Middle East," the chief of the world's biggest grouping of Muslim states warned Thursday.

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who heads the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), was speaking at the opening of an emergency meeting here on US policies on Israel and Iraq.

He said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to pull out of the Gaza strip while maintaining some Jewish settlements in the West bank "ignores and endangers fundamental issues that are sacred to the muslim...

"Indeed, if barred upon the Resolutions, the Israeli plan can literally wreck the entire peace process in the Middle East.

"It is most unfortunate that the United States administration has deemed it proper to support Israel's unilateral disengagement plan."

Malaysia called the OIC meeting at the request of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat after Bush last week backed Sharon's controversial plan, apparently reversing decades-old US policy.

Abdullah urged Washington to play the role of "honest broker," saying Sharon's plan contradicted the provisions of the UN-endorsed roadmap for peace.

He called on delegates to come up with new ways of approaching the problem, suggesting that if governments were incapable of delivering justice for the Palestinians it was perhaps time for a "people-based global movement to carry the flag for Palestine."

Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization-political chief Farouq Qaddumi told reporters on the sidelines of the conference that "the credibility of the US is overcome. They have destroyed their role right now."

"They have proposed the peace initiative but barely after the visit of Sharon, they have cancelled all these initiatives to restore the peace process."

The Palestinian ambassador to Malaysia Hamed al-Fares said a communique to be issued after the meeting contained "a radical plan", but gave no details apart from saying it would call for economic and political sanctions against Israel.

Abdullah said the situation in Iraq was also "turning for the worse" and urged the US to table a resolution in the UN Security Council to give the world body a "renewed role" through a new and expanded mandate. AFP

Michael Jackson indicted on child sex abuse charges

LOS ANGELES—Pop star Michael Jackson was indicted by a Santa Barbara County grand jury investigating child molestation allegations, according to news reports.

The Santa Barbara News-Press cited county sources but had no details about the indictments, but sheriff's officials said there was no confirmation or announcement. Similar reports Wednesday by ABC, CBS, MSNBC and Web sites for The New York Times and USA Today cited sources that were not identified.

Grand jury indictments are usually secret until a defendant is arraigned. The grand jury proceedings in the Jackson case replaced a preliminary hearing, which defendants often use to get an early preview of the case to go to trial.

Jackson's spokesperson, Raymone Bain, issued a statement on behalf of Jackson's attorneys saying the singer will plead not guilty during his scheduled April 30 arraignment if the grand jury issues an indictment. The statement did not confirm that an indictment has been handed down.

The singer and his attorneys "are confident that after a trial...Jackson will be fully exonerated," the statement went. "Michael is looking forward to that day in court."

Bain added in an interview that "nothing has been issued from the court which indicates that there is an indictment."

"In the next few days, as the dust settles, things will get clearer," she said Wednesday night. She said she had spoken with Jackson on Wednesday and that "he is cool and chipper."

Jackson attorney Mark Geragos, reached by telephone, would not answer questions from The Associated Press, Gerages, other defense attorneys and prosecutors in the case are covered by a gag order. The district attorney's office also would not comment about the media reports.

"The probability is a court statement, to let folks to give the information out, not the district attorney's office," said Kasan Tellem of Tellem Stockbridge, hired to handle media inquiries for District Attorney Tom Sneddon.

Tellem said court administrator Gary Blair would determine when the court would officially release any information about the grand jury. Messages left at Blair's office were not immediately returned.

The grand jury has spent the last three weeks hearing from witnesses, including a 14-year-old boy who claims the pop superstar sexually abused him. AP

Basra mourns 73 killed in suicide car bombings

BASRA, Iraq—Sorrow and anger gripped Iraq's southern city of Basra on Thursday as the families of 73 people slain by suicide bombers mourned their dead.

Four of the 89 people wounded in the blasts died overnight, hospital officials said, raising the death toll to 73.

Streets were quiet and many parents kept their children at home after 17 youngsters were incinerated on their way to school in Wednesday's coordinated bombings of police stations.

The five blasts at three police stations in the Shiite city and at the police academy in nearby Zubair, a mainly Sunni town, were the bloodiest attacks in British-controlled Iraq since the start of the US-led occupation a year ago.

As relatives prepared to bury the victims, followers of rebel Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr planned a protest rally to blame the US-led occupation for the security breakdown.

US President George W. Bush accused Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network of being behind the morning rush hour explosions.

"They just blew up innocent Iraqis," he said in Washington.

A senior military official in Baghdad said the Basra attacks bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda as to all evidence. "The method, the mode is consistent time after time—a spectacular event and a symbolic target," he said.

He pointed the finger at Monah al-Ezaryawi, a Jordanian militant with suspected links to al-Qaeda, arrested by US officials last year on suspicion of plotting suicide attacks.

AMINA Ezzam, 15, suffers burn-injury injuries to her head after being hurt in one of the explosions. —

to spark a civil war between Iraq's majority Sunnis and majority Shiites.

The Basra blasts shocked a city which had seen little of the violence exploding elsewhere in Iraq this month.

US forces have intensified battles with Sunni insurgents in the western city of Fallujah and redirected back-up, including by Sadr's Mehdi Army militia across the mainly Shiite south.

Clashes flared in Kufa, 16 km north of Najaf, on Thursday. Guerrillas fired rocket-propelled grenades and mortars at US Marines backed by helicopters, witnesses said.

Witnesses said Fallujah frontlines were calm and a local official said police were collecting heavy weapons from fighters under a peace deal announced by US forces on Sunday.

A senior official of the US-led administration said the quantity and quality of arms turned in so far was unimpressive.

"It's inchoate, not terribly encouraging, but what we could consider demonstrating no effort to comply fully," he said.

The US military has repeatedly questioned the ability of Iraqi mediators to persuade Fallujah gunmen to disarm.

"It's not nearly enough and will not be seen as the capability to deliver," the official said of the weapons haul.

The US military is also demanding the surrender of those behind the murder and public mutilation of four American private security guards ambushed in Fallujah on March 31.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said he had no plans to send more troops to Basra in response to the Shiite uprisings. Secretary Jack Straw said outside attacks would not derail plans to hand sovereignty to Iraqis at the end of June.

The US-led occupation which followed the toppling of Saddam Hussein is due to finish on June 30 with power handed to an interim Iraqi government, but transfer preparations have been eclipsed by bloodletting and hostage-taking this month.

Since the start of the war to oust Saddam in March last year, 511 US soldiers have been killed, Pentagon figures show.

More than 100 have been killed this month.

Denmark said a Danish businessman reported missing on April 11 had been found dead. A Pakistani hostage was killed this month by kidnappers demanding Italian troops leave Iraq. Reuters

Poland may also pull out troops; US still upbeat

WASHINGTON—The White House insisted on Wednesday the US-led coalition in Iraq was strong, despite comments from staunch ally Poland that it may join three other nations in withdrawing troops.

On a day when at least 68 people died in suicide car bombings in southern Iraq, President George W. Bush faced questions on Capitol Hill about whether enough country was being allocated to fund US military operations there this year.

"In honest with the Congress, be honest with the American people. Every ground squirrel in this country knows that it's going to be $50 billion to $75 billion in additional money required to operate on (in Iraq for this year," Nebraska Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel told NBC's "Today" show.

The White House did not rule out seeking additional funding this year after obtaining $87 billion last year. "I think it totally depends on the circumstances on the ground," said spokesman Scott McClellan.

Spain's decision a week ago to withdraw its 1,400 troops has triggered second thoughts among the original 34-nation coalition in Iraq. Honduras and the Dominican Republic have said they also are withdrawing troops.

Thailand said on Tuesday it will withdraw its 451 medical and engineering troops from Iraq if they are attacked.

And on Wednesday, Poland said it was reviewing its position in Iraq but would not pull troops out suddenly or without Washington's approval. Poland has been a key US ally in Iraq. Reuters

CBS displays photos of dying Princess Diana

LONDON—British media and associates of Princess Diana expressed anger Thursday after a US television network broadcast photos of the dying princess taken moments after a car accident.

The Guardian newspaper said CBS had descended to "ghoulish new depths of prurience in the Princess Diana incident."

CBS' "48 Hours" program showed two black-and-white pictures taken by paparazzi at the scene of the Aug. 31, 1997 accident in Paris. Diana died hours later; her companion, Dodi Fayed, and chauffeur Henri Paul also were killed.

The network justified the pictures—which showed an unconscious Diana being screened by a doctor as she lay slumped in the back of a car in the Alma road tunnel—were not graphic or exploitative.

But Dodi Fayed's father, Mohamed al Fayed, says CBS had behaved in "disgraceful and inconsiderate" manner.

"CBS obviously don't care about the appalling effect of showing images of murder victims," said Fayed, who has long insisted that Diana and his son were murdered. A lengthy French investigation concluded the crash was an accident caused by drunk and speeding driver Paul.

Clarence Haynes, the office of Diana's former husband, Prince Charles, and her two sons, declined to comment on the program.

CBS said the pictures were included in a graphic, detailed French investigation" file on the accident. Its major stories earlier had previously run pictures of the injured princess, although several are believed to have since suffered for sale. AP

Scientists create fatherless mouse

LONDON—Japanese and Korean scientists have created a fatherless mouse without using sperm in a reproductive feat akin to the birth of Dolly the sheep, the world's first cloned mammal.

Sons, aunts, aphids and some fish and reptiles reproduce without having sex in a process called parthenogenesis. Discovering a living mammal from same-sex parents was thought to be impossible.

Until now.

The birth of Kaguya, the daughter of two female mice, which is reported in the science journal Nature on Wednesday by Tomohiro Kono of Tokyo University of Agriculture, shows that a healthy mammal known as a parthenote can be created without any male help.

"The parthenote developed to adulthood with the ability to reproduce offspring," Kono and his colleagues said in the Nature report.

Mammals inherit one set of chromosomes from their mothers and another from their fathers. Embryos containing only female chromosomes usually die early in the womb such fetus with only male genetic material are abnormal.

Kono and his team overcame the problem and created Kaguya by fusing two female eggs after knocking out a key gene in the donor egg. The gene is involved in imprinting, a mechanism which controls the activity of genes either inherited from the father and mother.

The fused eggs were chemically activated to produce embryos that were implanted into the wombs of mice.

"The paper shows that, like cloning, another natural form of reproduction is possible in mice and may be possible in some other mammals," said Stuart Bunt of the Roslin Institute of Edinburgh, where Dr Ian Wilmut led the Dolly team.

"However, this was achieved with even lower efficiency than the cloning process used to make Dolly and therefore it is even more unreputable and unsafe to consider using this for humans," he added.

Only 0.6 percent of the embryos Kono and his colleagues created survived. It took hundreds of hand eggs to produce 20 offspring but Kaguya was the only mouse to survive. Others were stillborn or abnormal.

"This is an incredible achievement, the process of creating these mice required persevering and patience. From around 600 eggs only two mice were created. As a result, this technique is far too complicated to be used in humans," said Prof. Azim Surani of the University of Cambridge in England.

But the research could improve understanding of genetic imprinting and what causes abnormalities in embryos, as well as knowledge about the beginning of life.

Kono said his results suggest that parental imprinting prevents parthenogenesis in mammals and creates a male role in reproduction.

"Until we fully understand the role and regulation of imprinted genes in development, it seems that the participation of the father in reproduction will remain necessary," David Leeber and Patrick Tam, of the University of Sydney in Australia, said in a commentary in the journal. *Reuters*

AZALEAS IN BLOOM

People admire Japanese azaleas in full bloom at the Meiji shrine in Tokyo April 22. The azaleas, about 2,000 flowering shrubs in about 120 varieties, attract more than 600,000 visitors during the max-week bloom season every year, a spokesperson of the shrine said.

Half of Latin America wants money more than votes

LIMA—Latin America is enjoying an unprecedented run of democracy but half its citizens would prefer a dictatorship if that improved their living standards, according to a UN-sponsored report released on Wednesday.

"Opinion polls tell us that today only about 56 percent of Latin Americans prefer democracy to authoritarian rule," said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a message to the launch in Lima of the UN Development Program-backed report.

"That is very sad. More important, it is wrong. The solution to Latin America's ills does not lie in a return to authoritarianism. It lies in a stronger and deepened democracy," Annan said.

But while the military has retreated to the barracks, democracy has not meant equality in Latin America, where the richest 10 percent have an income 84 times bigger than the poorest 10 percent. Forty percent of children live in poverty and the average child goes to school for just 6.2 years.

"Latin America has earned our deep political and economic reforms in the last 20 years and the results are terrible," said the project's leader, ex-Spanish foreign Minister Jaime Caprera. "After 20 years of sacrifice, poverty remains."

He said it was "irresponsible to ignore the danger" which that posed for the region's young democracies.

The report canvassed 320 leaders, including serving and former heads of state, and included polls that surveyed some 20,000 people in the 18 countries studied, most of which had authoritarian governments a quarter of a century ago.

Interestingly, the leaders surveyed did not feel they themselves wielded real power. That ties with economic groups, according to more than three-quarters of respondents, and with the media, according to over two-thirds of those questioned.

The research—which took in all of industrialist Latin America plus the Dominican Republic—was conducted in 2002.

"We'll be extremely dangerous if we thought democracy today the Latin American enjoyed robust health," former Uruguayan President Julio-Maria Sanguinetti told reporters.

Caputo, 60, said he had spent two-thirds of his life under dictatorships.

"Does the absence of a coup indicate democracy is healthy?"

he added. "No. As we are so conditioned to think only coups endanger democracy, we tend to forget other dangers."

One problem the report highlighted was the lack of deep-rooted political parties and the prevalence of ad hoc movements, led by charismatic leaders known as "caudillos."

It found that 61.6 percent of those surveyed believed their governments broke campaign promises because they had lied to win the vote; that 41.9 percent tolerated some corruption provided "things work"; and that 54.7 percent would rather have a hard-line ruler over a democratic one if authoritarianism would resolve their economic problems.

Caputo said that more than a dozen Latin American presidents in the last decade did not finish their terms, although old-style military coups at times followed by bloodbaths appeared to be a thing of the past. *Reuters*

Security Council backs probe of kickbacks in Iraq food deal

By Evelyn Leopold

UNITED NATIONS—Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, began a high-level investigation on Wednesday into allegations of kickbacks and bribes in the UN-run oil-for-food program for Iraq.

Volcker assumed his post at least of a three-man team after he was assured that all 15 members of the UN Security Council adopted a resolution to back the investigation, which will include a probe of contracts with Iraq around the world.

"We will be following the money as well as we can," Volcker told a news conference.

"I assured a resolution to make sure that member governments and member states knew what they were getting into," he said.

The council's resolution called "on member states, in making their national regulatory authorities, to cooperate fully by all appropriate means with the inquiry."

Under the now-defunct program, Iraq was permitted to sell oil in order to buy civilian goods. Its purpose was to ease the impact on ordinary Iraqis of sanctions imposed after the 1991 Gulf War.

But Volcker acknowledged his group would not have subpoena power and was relying on voluntary cooperation from foreign governments, whose officials and firms may have made deals with Saddam Hussein.

He predicted he would get more cooperation from UN staff, where he was assured that diplomatic immunity would be waived.

The panel intends to hire investigators, accountants and legal specialists in an effort to analyze contracts, he said.

The program allowed Saddam's government to choose buyers of its oil and suppliers of goods.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said he took the allegations seriously, which include accusations that a senior UN official took a bribe from Saddam's government.

"Obviously, these are serious allegations which we take seriously. And this is why we've put together a very senior group to investigate it," Annan said. "I want to get to the truth, and I want to get to the bottom of this."

The General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of the US Congress, says Iraq alone pocketed $4.4 billion by imposing illegal surcharges on oil sales.

Iraq is estimated to have smuggled $1.7 billion in oil outside the UN program, which amounted to some $67 billion from December 1996 until last year, a few months after the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Reuters

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

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New boat people

IN ITS provocative decision to send tourists to the disputed Spratlys, Vietnam is incurring the ire not only of the other claimants but also of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). Vietnam is showing the arrogance that is not to be expected of a relatively new member of the Asean, which, after all, is committed to fostering amity and understanding among nations in the region.

EDITORIAL Hanoi claims that the visit is perfectly within its right as it has "indisputable sovereignty" over the entire Spratlys. Can there be anything more highhanded than that? In the very least, Hanoi should have exercised restraint and maintained the status quo.

This is not the first time that Hanoi has pushed its claim on the Spratlys in an arrogant, unneighborly fashion. In 2002, it fired shots at Philippine military planes inspecting that part of the Spratlys claimed by Manila. Previously, it had clashed with the Chinese in the area. Hanoi seems to be recklessly pushing its claim too far.

In its latest move, Hanoi is sending a tourist ship in the territory where it has set up military facilities. In the guise of promoting the tour on a purely private matter, Hanoi said the tour is being run by the Hai Thanh company, which is however affiliated with the Navy Command. The fact that a private tourism company has ties with the military should show how the communist bosses of Vietnam have a totalitarian hold on just about anything, be it public affairs or private enterprise, be it civilian or military matters.

It does not matter to Vietnam that it is a signatory to the convention on the Conduct of Parties in the Spratlys. The code, which urges claimants not to do anything that will complicate the territorial issue or escalate the tension there, is non-binding, as it behooves its signatories to exercise utmost restraint and maturity in dealing with the Spratlys question. But apparently restraint and maturity are not virtues to be expected of the Vietnamese.

China has already protested vehemently against the tour. The Philippines is going about the diplomatic front cautiously, giving Hanoi the benefit of the doubt. The Department of Foreign Affairs has hinted it would resolve the matter through diplomatic consultations with other Asean members. This is a civilized response that may not however stop Vietnam, which, as the record shows, is too much of a bully and a big bear.

Clearly Hanoi is pushing the envelope. It does not matter that it endangers the life of those who have registered for the tour. "We have to learn some experience from the first time before we could offer regular tours to both local and foreign tourists in the future," a commentator has said.

We don't know what lesson Vietnam will learn from this latest foolishness. Perhaps a new lesson on pushing the frontiers of tourism: from making the most tourism-dollars out of the French colonial structures and bombed-out and shelled Ho Chi Minh trail to making the most of potential tourism (and petroleum) dollars out of the flashpoint on the South China Sea. What areas would be safe from the predations of Vietnamese tourists? Not the turtle nests and marine life preserves of the Spratlys.

Ah, but Vietnam has learned long ago its lesson. Its sending off a rickety boatload of "tourists" to the Spratlys to strike a potential tourism niche, is to just repeating what it did some decades back, when it caused to be sent off, directly or indirectly, boatloads of indochinese refugees to its neighbors, the Philippines notably. These refugees were fleeing from the hard and repressive conditions of their homeland. In effect the tour arrives in the Spratlys this month, it would be déjà vu, indeed.

From boat people to boat tourists! How the times have changed! And how little they have changed!

Vietnam or Lebanon?

IS THE Bush's Vietnam? Like with every historical analogy, there are obvious objections to this one. The Vietnam War lasted 10 years and cost 58,000 American soldiers their lives. Besides, the Americans can still assume that a silent majority of Iraqis are happy about the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Another less flattering analogy just applies: Iraq is Bush's Lebanon.

FOREIGN COMMENT Where Israel's emerging mainland on Beirut in 1982, they succeeded in expelling the PLO for the overall second time but so he negative. The PLO reorganized itself, reclothed, rebuilded, the hostility against Israel intensified, and in the end the troops withdrew battle-shelled, worn-down by the daily skirmishes.

More and more, the doubts grow in many Americans. Has it wrong after all? That's the fundamental question that no one can evade.

See Rigoberto Tiglao's Beltline

SC: Ban on opinion polls 'unconstitutional'

UNTIL April 16, this column suggested the enactment of a law banning opinion polls before an election because they unfairly influence people to vote for candidates leading in the surveys. The Lambino law on "[p]ublication of surveys" allowing national candidates 15 days before an election" and surveys "affecting local candidates" seven days before an election," however, on May 5, 2001, acting on a petition filed by the Social Weather Stations and Kamahalan Publishing Corp., the Supreme Court by a vote of 7-4-3 (seven justices concurring, five justices dissenting and two justices on leave or not participating) declared the provision of RA 9006 as an "unconstitutional abridgement of freedom of speech, expression and the press."

The majority of seven justices held that the provision "would violate: (1) it imposes a prior restraint on the freedom of expression; (2) it is a direct and total suppression of a category of protected—not through such suppression is only for a limited period, and (3) government interest cannot be adequately protected by achieved by means other than the suppression of freedom of expression."

That decision of the seven justices is the reason why today surveys can be conducted and their results published even a day before the election or on election day itself, remained said.

However, the five dissenting justices, who spoke through their respective Justice Santiago, argued that the provision "advances safety sure-way done to the election might be cause as in the case of a ban and final tally of the results, giving more source to fly by night pollsters or survey groups controlled by vested interests to manipulate the survey results." The dissenting opinion also gained from the deliberations of the bicameral conference committee wherein then Sen. Raul Roco said "that late misses our every governor 'pushing' of candidates in the tail end of the surveys by their own party name recognition."

The dissents do have a fine point: for some, a candidate or political party that has doubts on the results of the survey has all the right to commission or costly the one data which were used. The candidate or political party may refute or confirm their accuracy.

And anyway those candidates who rose in the surveys don't believe the polls which only about who arm candidates/voters.

* * *

Another letter is from Quezon City Mayor Sonny Belmonte answering charges aired by former Mayor Ismael Mathay Jr. at a Kapihan sa Manila Bread and reported in this column of March 31. To be fair to Belmonte, we allowed him to answer the charges in the April 13 kapihan.

Belmonte refuted the charges one by one:

1. That Quezon City is not the richest city but Makati.

"The Commission on Audit, in its 2002 report, said Quezon City has the highest income, the disparity in Mathay's and COA's figures stemmed from the fact that he did not include the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) in his computation."

2. That the personal revenues were derived from unprecedented increases in tax rates ranging from 145 to 400 percent. Mathay implied that this is illegal.

It was very legal, retorted Belmonte: "What we did was simply adjust the tax rates of Quezon City to those audited based under the Local Government Code of 1991. Obviously, Quezon City had to increase its revenues in its many wish-list items kept unusually low under Mr. Mathay's administration. Other cities in Metro Manila took advantage of this law to raise their business taxes while Mathay did not.

"Taking a more conservative tax savings the businesses concerned gained during the lights of low business taxes, we believe that the adjustment of the rates was long overdue and just slightly late."

3. That the increase in sale of tax delinquent properties was one of the reasons for the increase in Quezon City's income and that amount is the lowest collected.

"Amnesty is a poor substitute for good governance and for collection," replied Belmonte. "Mathay had an amnesty every year yet he never reached his revenue targets. Public amnesty is the preferred remedy in taxation. Instead of rewarding the delinquent taxpayers, we have given a 10 percent discount to prompt payment."

4. On the cases pending in court questioning the new tax rates.

True, admitted Belmonte, but Mathay did not mention that there is Executive Secretary Simeon Datumanong reversed Secretary Bernardo Perez's earlier ruling in the Diamond Hotel case and squarely decided in Quezon City's favor on all the issues raised by the taxpayer-corporations. The later decision of Secretary Marcelino Cabarroguis of the Philippine Courts are ruled purely on the procedural issue. A motion for reconsideration has been filed by Quezon City.

These issues will eventually end up in the Supreme Court, said Belmonte, who expressed confidence that the Quezon City government's position would be upheld. "In the meantime," he said, "we have invested P3.9-P4 billion in infrastructure projects, there he'll to so, which greatly strengthen the underpinnings of the city's economy. We have a cash balance of P2.720 billion in the general fund as of April 1, 2004."

Pope says...

THERE'S THE RUB *Conrado de Quiros*

OVERTIME, of course will be scrambling to say the Pope's remarks are an endorsement of her or his presidential bid and an indictment of her or his rivals. In a message telgrammed Philippine Ambassador to the Vatican Leonardo Mercado, the Pope said Christian officials should be pillars of moral standards and "use their conscience, which is of more value than any type of gain and recognition." He reminded Filipino that the said human obligations are the very measure of democracy in any society.

The reminders are not unlike the one birthday Leonardo Mercado passed a couple of years ago when he said that Christians should be examples of the Beatitudes. Or the one he issued upon an indictment of PD and an endorsement of GMA. In his guidelines, Bradley said the candidates the voters should choose should be deeply pious; rather than largely popular, should have a more conscience life; should be rather than a dominant version of it. While that clearly indicted PD, because he is the popular candidate and because his previous career, like Erap's para sa mahirap one, is rife with the things, it indicted GMA, as well. You go through her list, as I did in a column, and GMA fail in every one of them.

Dino here. PD may be an unknown quantity as far as the corruption question is concerned, but not as the people around her. Some of the people she has surrounded the other week when he—and Lorna Lapeña, erstwhile pillar of false it—appeared at a picture with Imelda Marcos. They all had their arms raised, Lorna, dressed to kill-like. For a opposition, had Imelda not been convicted of kleptocracy and because his previous career was laughable. Truly, the lord works in mysterious ways.

As to Rocky Laurel, he was Erap's favorite hand boy and frontman beneficiary of his patronage and largesse. Erap was generous with his ill-gotten loot and delivered a prince's ransom for the purpose—one least through the PMP and the Nacionalista Party—to enable Rocky to climb to the top. It is a testament only to Erap's and Corpus' unending abilities that he never managed to pin Lorna down on ill-gotten wealth charges. And it is a testament to the quality of our courts that he is free to run for president rather than languish in jail for the commission of unpardonable crimes. There's not another way for the question the Pope has in mind for the person who will lead this Christian nation out of the wilderness.

But neither may GMA take comfort from all this. At the very least, she cannot pass the test of keeping those elections fair and clean. To this day, her use of the Comelec officials who participated in a case with Mayebelline, a scam involving the grant of a million-peso contract to computerize counting of the most unqualified kind, has been suspended for 1, 000 but the money been returned. Instead, what GMA has done is to populate the vote-approved cabinet to ensure hostile elections administrators who ensure cheating. Add to that the use of military-style campaigns that shut down streets after a losing conscripted to do the dumb's work to cheat.

Just as well, the nation puts the anti-corruption and morality test with her peers and with the use of people's money to advertise herself. I encourage that Tonight de Leon has been struck down by an affliction, but I am not sorry that I have been critical of her for helping her host PD to the summit in the vote list. I owe up to intense her Pulidos to avoid the installment of his new parish priest, and along the whole length of the lightning all you could see were GMA posters, mostly of their government promotions, and the Pulidos paid for it. Not every pound of her drink, there were Eral Cliffs.

Frankly, I don't know why we—the media, the Church, civil society and the various guardians of morality and democracy—keep complaining about our elected public officials being corrupt when we gleefully agree to their punishing corruption in getting to become so. We agree to vote officials running on money to get in, or remain in, power; let's shut up when they steal some more after they've done so.

But infinitely more than that, it's hard to see how GMA can be the Pope's ideal candidate when GMA has gone against one Pope's teachings on two very vital issues. The first is capital punishment. The Pope has been pleading for GMA to stay the execution of Death Row convicts, the most of which is Flor Contemplacion, which has been victimized by influences. GMA was manipulatively eager some months ago to make a show of sending a kidnapper or two to their bitakes. It was only when international pressure became ridiculous that she desisted from her plan.

The second and far more important issue is the American invasion of Iraq. That was what it was: it wasn't a war, it was an invasion. As for the reasons for that invasion, they were at best patent lies, George Bush has always had the hots for Iraq, and wanted it more than al-Qaeda. Iraq never represented a clear and present danger to America, as every report, not just the Pope's, has since made clear. It was nothing in categorical terms. The invasion was immoral, and the Pope, along with everyone with a conscience—oh, but the Pope is right about conscience being a buffer against corruption, including the one that ravages the soul—had every reason to oppose it.

But GMA prefers to defend Bush rather than the Pope. Well, Bush is indeed now. He's GMA now. Good luck to all concerned.

Hat-tip to the Pope's—as finch as Archbishop Rosales'—guidelines in voting for a president, you have only two candidates to consul. or. That is either Raul Roco or Eddie Villanueva. Roco is the best bet for the right candidate, but the popular vote—of the four who's buying votes with Philhealth cards. And the Pope did say, use your conscience.

Sentimental journey

ANALYSIS

Armando Doronila

THE RETURN of Hard Stance to regain the campaign after soaking medical treatment in the United States is largely a sentimental journey. His presence is unlikely to create a decisive swing of voters that can tilt the precarious balance between the two front runners, President Macapagal-Arroyo and Fernando Poe Jr. Neither will he remove under the minor parties and fence-sitters.

Poor Fernando Poe Jr. looks healthier and more buoyant than he was when he left the country a week ago. But his return will not halm the fact that he has been incapacitated and his supporters' absence has diminished his campaign, which was already floundering at the time of his sudden departure.

Poe's return will do nothing for returns to the hustings to everybody's guest. This is a question that begs clarification even among his die-hard followers. Will he endorse anyone, or will he leave them to decide on their own accord? Already his Alliance for Hope has been left in disarray following his declaration that he will not endorse Senator Panfilo Lacson, an alliance partner, has stepped into the vacuum and taken command of a group that he can direct to support any candidate of his choice.

After untimely Poe's unguided, if not misguided, campaign in the provinces in the past week, his return to Metro Manila is a demonstration of faith in a lost cause. In such a case, this line of hardcore core will be denied to either the President or Poe.

In this essentially Poe's return will have little political significance at all. All it can do is make blood-red proof that he still has the physical stamina to campaign in the provinces.

The important question Poe has been overlooked is, where will the young voters of his constituency direct their votes now that their hope has been shattered by the disability of their rallying point? Some of the opinion surveys since their November lead have shown a precipitous decline of the voters' support. The surveys only showed the ratings of the first five presidential candidates according to socio-economic classification (i.e., upper and middle classes, the poor and the very poor). How the candidates rated among voters, especially the young, has been completely ignored.

Since there is no believe that his second nominees—by virtue of the upper and middle classes, a campaign in which both he and Tito Sotto have been campaigning for support. But Sotto has claimed his strength lies among the youth and that they identify with him more than with the rivals.

Let's take a look at the demographic picture. According to the Commission on Population, voters aged 18-24 make up nearly 30 percent of the 43 million registered voters nationwide. Half of the country's nearly 80 million population is made up of those aged 25 and below. However, the Commission on Elections has noted that about 4.3 million have registered in more than the last three years.

The PopCen says that young voters would dominate the total three presidential elections beginning this year because of their growing numbers. "We must not underestimate the power of the young," says PopCom Executive Tomas Osias.

The earlier they are educated, the better they mentally for the coming elections, including issues concerning national leadership. None of the candidates, except for Roco, has highlighted the concerns of the young related to education, health services and reproductive health needs.

The recreation of the young have not been adequately presented to the social and political agenda. Even of the main candidates, in particularly Poe who is running on an platform as all, merely banking on his movie popularity to carry him to the presidency. Without a political platform that captures their interests and their aspirations, the young voters are left to decide for themselves as to which they will cast their first votes.

The focus of attention in the campaign, which is rightly centered by Mr. Macapagal and Poe, to go from this near-deadlock can be broken, and an early indication of the realignment of the opposition will be critical in deciding the results of the elections. Sen. Panfilo Lacson, according to the surveys, can score or, in percent which, hypothetically, can be shifted to Poe, if Lacson joins the opposition coalition.

The question of young voters' bloc, which is at least 28 percent, dominating first they can flexibly campaign in which both he and Tito Macapagal are competing for support. But Sotto has claimed his strength lies among the youth and that they identify with him more than with the rivals.

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Pro-family workplaces

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

I HEARD a health-care government organization for 11 years, a time when I picked up many insights into Filipino society and culture. One thing that always amazed me was the way staff members would approach me, face really serious, to ask for permission to get married.

Well, of course permission is too strong a term to use. What was actually happening was the "pasabot" process, literally to let someone know.

But with an element of asking for approval. Initially I found this rather strange, and I still make it a point to tell staff members the decision to marry should be a couple's.

But I'm realizing, too, that "pasabot" is a Filipino way of acknowledging someone who is older, and presumably wiser, to ask not just for approval but for counsel and advice.

The office "pasabot" for marriage is therefore an opportunity to talk about family life, in our own experiences, it starts with saying out the decision itself to get married. This was how I learned, long before the era of surveys of young adult sexuality, that so many of our marriages occur because the girl is pregnant. The pressures are tremendous, splitting families into two camps: those insisting the marriage take place and those who oppose this marriage, but so much because the couple might be separated but because they don't like the prospective groom or bride.

In the context of my own office, that marriage "pasabot" has alerted me to the need for offices to have a comprehensive program around, not just family planning but family life and sexuality in general and that the program should include unmarried staff members.

Philippine laws require that large companies provide family planning education. I know that there are enough problems confronting that law for the big companies but those of us who believe in family planning should be doing our share even with medium- and small-sized companies.

Our Health NGO-Ed have the advantage that we were doing family planning training workshops anyway, so we made sure staff members got exposed to all methods, "natural" and "artificial." So, thinking back, I believe the workshops were only a small part of the office's family planning education. From some importance was the staff's knowledge that they could openly talk about family planning and sexuality, even over lunch or while commuting home. Soon, both female and male staff were sharing their experiences and exhorting each other to physicians and clinics where they could get family planning services.

The results have been heartwarming. It used to be that staff members would announce, in the most plain and matter-of-fact way, that they were expecting another baby. These days, there's more of jubilation and anticipation. Most staff members have two or three children, spaced at least three years apart, and seem happy.

Our annual Christmas parties turn into a celebration of the family, as staff members welcome the new babies, while complimenting the older children: "Wow, he's taking after your science in UP" or "Eh, look, she's taller now than her father and I heard she's among the best in her class."

Family life is strengthened when parents and children are spared the stress that comes with having "too many, too soon."

The benefits affect the entire office as well. Our office does not allow home-to-staff members have some up with their own colleagues, a kind of cooperative food for emergencies; we find that the rarely used because staff members are able to budget their resources.

All that results in sharp contrast to offices that offer little or nothing by way of family planning services. I've seen it all too often in my work as a human rights advocate: women are especially neglected when it comes to education on family planning; it endless cycles of absences, losses, dropouts and, worst of all, clinics. The litany of woes is familiar to office managers: salary advances for a delivery, the baby's milk, a sick child, a hospitalized child, the hospitalized child's sister who got infected too, tuition, books, dental braces, and so on. Who's the father? Is he supporting his own a year old? The women suffer more, having to bear the brunt of responsibilities, literally converting a job into homebody—looking for life.

I'm encouraged to see our business sector now taking family planning seriously. Robin Chamber of Commerce and Industry hosted a population and development meeting yesterday and I hope that other major cities will have similar conferences, partly to send a message to politicians to take population issues more seriously.

In the long term, the entire country stands to gain from this foresight. Again if I might refer back to the health NGO's worked with, talk about family planning has actually become rare, merely because it's become part of common knowledge. These days, the staff members talk more about jobs: school plans, a retirement fund. Growing how small the ISH environment checks out) and lastly a cooperative housing scheme.

When people worry less about day-to-day survival, they can better plans for the future. In our health NGO, the entire staff, from utility workers to the medical director, have shared dreams of a stable life here in the Philippines, of getting their kids into UP as one of the better universities, of producing a generation of Filipinos who won't think of families simply in terms of months to feed, but of children, human beings with minds and hearts to counteract.

* * *

Comments: to mlpoli@pinoykasi.net

THEY SAID

'Culture uplift'

"We always accept that we are a Third World country. People always say 'We're India,' long-term fatalism culture culture, make human happy culture pa." That's artist. People don't realize that it's the culture that uplifts you, it is what will give you the inspiration in life to get up in your lean to be her. She have to fight."

—Director Marilyn Ocampo on the importance of culture in the Pag-ibig Friendly exercise

A constituency for reproductive health

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

All I want this, the "grand gathering of population and reproductive health advocates," called "Hanay ng Sambayanan sa Hinaharap 2004," is about to begin, starting with a human chain around the Quezon Memorial Circle, after which the participants will march to the nearby Sunken for the grand rally.

The rally, to be participated in by members of organizations, reproductive health advocates, community organizations and urban poor groups, youth organizations and members of political parties and party-list groups, is meant to demonstrate broad public support for reproductive health and rights. The size of the rally is also meant to make their positions known on the need for policy and program support for family planning and other reproductive health needs.

I intend to speak at the rally as well. Rodolfo Nazareno, who is running for reelection under the K-4 banner; Jessie Garcia, spokesperson of presidential candidate Panfilo Lacson; representatives of other presidential candidates; undersecretary Quezon City Dinnie Benitez Belmonte, as well as other national and local candidates, including those for party-list.

Why the fanfare/noise? At the high point of a nearly one-year campaign to elevate population concerns, family planning and other elements of reproductive health to a campaign issue, it is meant to tell the senators of both chambers and voters to the need to give serious thought to such issues as one vote of population growth, the ability of individuals and couples to choose the method of their choice in planning their families, the right of young people to information and services on reproductive health, and the impact of a growing population on the environment and the economy.

FOR months now, the member-groups of a coalition called "Population and Reproductive Health Movement," the Philippine NGO Coalition on Population, Health and Welfare (PHCOAL), Friendly Care, Foundation for Adolescent Development and the Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD), have sponsored activities—from symposiums on issues of reproductive health to televised debates, from votes to house visits—to challenge candidates and officials to focused on raising public awareness of the issues and rewarding a constituency for reproductive health and rights.

One of the most important activities of the coalition was sponsoring part of an "Ulat ng Bayan" survey of Pulse Asia intended to trace public opinion support for family planning and officials expressing second policies.

Actually, the survey results weren't all that surprising to me. If anything, they underscored what I've suspected all along: that I have wrong for years that the majority of Filipinos (67 percent in the "Ulat ng Bayan") think family planning is important to them, that they support the right of couples to plan their families and make their own choices, and that many would, in fact, vote for candidates who publicly support the right.

Which is why, when some candidates say there is need to "respect the thoughts of the majority" at this time, many of both including their support for the Church's disapproval of all family planning methods save for natural family planning, I wonder if they truly realize or grasp what the majority thinks on this matter. It seems that ordinary Filipinos have moved far beyond conventional positions on the issue, outpacing even officials and opinion leaders.

* * *

BY COINCIDENCE, a friend sent me three or copies from an article, entitled "In Defense of Woman Suffrage," written by Maria Paz Rizo, dona Guazon, an early suffragist, and published in the Feb. 27, 1921 issue of The Manila Times. I thought it apropos to share her thoughts on suffrage and family planning, which she calls "depopulation," if only to show how long Philippine society has been debating these issues.

The strongest argument against Filipino suffrage is that it will depopulate the country, because higher education tends to limit birthrate. "Woman suffrage is the consequence of higher education and not its cause, so ignorant women have no notion that education is an integral part of their development and has children enough? suffer if the government of her country goes wrong... This woman will never move a finger to help her countrymen, because she does not know the meaning of country or countrymen... This type of woman will hardly be taken a mayor's fancy and kicks and bruises of her husband should be he, as many men are, a cruel man or an alcoholic. This type of women will never demand Woman Suffrage.

"Higher education teaches men that woman is her equal and not his serf; it develops his sense of justice and true manhood. It compels him to help his wife to take a mayor's fancy and kicks and bruises of her husband should be he, as many men are, a cruel man or an alcoholic. This type of women will never demand Woman Suffrage.

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"The progress of civilization compels both, but especially the male of the species, to seek for second sense before he is able to care enough or to attain sufficient concentration in the performance of intellectual work. The woman must be trained to respect a smaller number of children if not to educate and couple than from an uneducated man who marries at 16 or 20 a girl of 15 or 16. A few brothers among the educated class is the result of the length of time employed in the preparation of one's life work, the cost of living, the high cost of living, especially in cities, the need for more careful rearing of children to fit each one for a struggle that is growing more intense every day. It's a few brothers is the outcome of higher education, a well-spread, regardless of whether or not Woman Suffrage is granted to our women. There is no Woman Suffrage without having about the much desired depopulation of the islands."

Respect for the flag

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

THE OFFICIAL Gazette and the records of the Philippine and the United States will show names who came to stand them that are do not lack laws. It amuses me that the solution to every problem seems to be enacting a new law or ordinance somewhere. One problem is not in the quantity or quality of existing laws; it is compliance and enforcement which are lacking.

Over the past week, I have been watching all the political advertisements on television, seeing how aspiring government officials are packaged for public consumption. TV news also gives us reports on the campaigns of the various candidates and I am struck by how much the flag is the colors of the flag seem to be in the background all the time. One idea is familiar with the Flag and Heraldic Code of the Philippines (Republic Act 8491) can easily spot a number of infractions, the most glaring of which is the wearing by members of study resembling the flag. It is one thing to wear a shirt or a tie or even a flag pendant, but to use the design of the flag on a shirt makes one unsure, whether there is a line or no line bursting it.

There is much about respect for the flag that I learned as a first boyer boy scout to raise it, how to lower it, how to fold it and how dispose of it when worn out or ragged. I remember the flag as the colors of the flag were

Corruption went down under GMA

OPINION solutions are opinion solutions. But unless a columnist distorts facts to argue his opinion, this is a breach of journalistic ethics.

Consider de Quiros slamming Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's record, according to the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report. Among 102 countries, we were 92 here years, slipping from 76 in 2003."

This statement is false. De Quiros was referring to the report's Corruption Subindex, but didn't mention the actual scores. The chief economist of the Makati Business Club, which is the Philippine research site of the WEF Global Competitiveness Report, noted: "The country's score on the Corruption Subindex improved to 3.38 in 2003 from 3.25 in 2002."

In other words, the level of corruption in the Philippines decreased in 2003.

It wasn't just a case of simply misunderstanding the WEF report. The WEF's report itself emphasized that one reason the Philippine ranking in 2003 seemed to worsen was that the 2002 report included only 80 countries, while the 2003 report listed 102. Even so, the WEF noted that among the 102 countries listed in 2003, "the Philippines rank on corruption actually moved further away from the bottom of the list [in 2003] as 58 steps from 4 steps [in 2002]."

De Quiros made two more distortions of data when he wrote: "According to the UNDP the human poverty index... has gotten worse. From 22 during Estrada's time to 28 during GMA's time." He was referring to the rankings as reported in the UNDP's Human Development Reports 2003.

The rankings were based on composite values, which were in turn derived from data on four major indicators: probability at birth of not surviving to age 40; adult literacy rate; access to clean water; and underweight children for age. All of these data were collected for years 2000 or 2001, the years when Joseph Estrada's anti-government lead in import. They do not reflect President Macapagal's governance.

De Quiros made the same distortion of data when he wrote in the same column: "HDI [Human Development Index] has fallen from 77 during Erap's time to 84 during GMA's time."

The Philippine HDI ranking of 84 was reported in the UNDP's Human Development Reports 2003. Again, the ranking was based on computations of data for 2000 and 2001. The ranking, as in the human poverty index, therefore hardly reflects President Macapagal's performance. In fact, since the HDI is purely based on gross domestic product data, it mentioned literacy of the world GDP growth during Estrada's term. (According to Wasiu Mustapha's calculations, annual average GDP growth under Estrada's watch was 2.9 percent, as against Mr Macapagal's 4 percent.)

This column, and I suspect most of the ill and vociferous anti-GMA columns, would seem to be classic cases of garbage in, garbage out.

—ALEXANDRO D. ESCLAS
presidential chief-of-staff,
Malacañang, Manila

LETTERS

The true last samurai

RESPONDING to Rina Jimenez-David's column "Remnants of war" (PDI, 3/14/04) wherein she regretfully surrendered in presenting a concise but very credible critique of the treacherous, unconstitutional moves of the 2004 Ad Group, let Ad Hoc, Imperial Japanese Navy Line Commander and last samurai Yukio Mishima's contemporary "Samurais of the Sky" plunged to their deaths (yes, literally) amid anti-government noise and festival to be the entire population of Japan up to the second half of 1945. However, one samurai, as an entirely likeless dose of overdose, was "re-born" officially in the form of Hirohiro, Emperor of the late-Showa Era.

While it is true that Emperor Hirohiro declared the abolition of the samurai class in 1871, their Code of Honor and patriotic loyalty was religiously retained and today's

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Cavite politicians vow peaceful polls

By Marlen Ramos
Mindanao Latest Bureau

DASMARIÑAS, Cavite—Despite the divisions heralding them now, supporters and allies of presidential candidate Sen. Panfilo Lacson in Cavite yesterday slammed reports that said they were considering leaving their provincemate's candidacy even as they vowed for peaceful and honest elections.

Both camps of leading Cavite betters "Spring" Mallari and the Remulla clan also denied reports that they were preparing their armed men and private armies as they anticipate a bloody election.

Rep. Gilbert Remulla of the second district said their family and supporters were thought of with alarming their support for Lacson after the senator's alleged failure to convince Mallari not to support the rival candidacy of his brother, lawyer Crispin "Boying" Remulla.

Mallari, the Magdalo Party's gubernatorial candidate, dropped Crispin, the party's official candidate, in the congressional race of the third district in favor of Ilsong Mayor Potrie Madlangsakay.

He said the row between their family and Mallari could have been averted if only Lacson met with the governor before he came out in public and announced he was support ing Madlangsakay.

"I told Senator Lacson about the matter two weeks before Mallari came out in public. [After he had spoken with Mallari], he told me that the governor denied that he was dropping Boying in the third district," Remulla told the Inquirer.

"But despite what happened, we never said we're withdrawing our support for Senator Lacson and Mallari. He is still our candidate," he added.

Remulla, however, admitted that Mallari's decision to back Madlangsakay "could create confusion" among their local candidates and supporters.

"All politics is local. By supporting a rival candidate, it is possible for Mallari to help Madlangsakay in asking support from a rival camp (Imsaniet) are are already with Lacson. That's where the confusion exists," he explained.

"Obviously, Mallari's move could affect Lacson's chances for the presidency. If he really wants a united Cavitenos for Lacson, why is he doing this?"

Earlier, Mallari said the rumor between him and the Remullas would not affect Lacson's candidacy as "the issue was too local."

"Lacson has nothing to do with my decision to withdraw my support for Boying. This was a personal decision," Mallari said, as he admitted that he supported his party mate's opponent without the approval of Magdalo.

Remulla also brushed off speculations that they were preparing their private armies. He also denied allegations that they were keeping guests and "hired guns."

Ship stranded to give way to bomb search

SURIGAO CITY—An inter-island vessel of the Negros Navigation bound for Iloilo City with over 1000 passengers on board was stranded in this city's port on Wednesday because of a bomb threat.

Skipper Ubony Ledesma of the MV Sto.Nino, which came from Bgao City, decided to make an emergency docking at the Dumaguete Port after receiving a radio message from the Bgao Coast Guard stating that a passenger of the vessel was bringing a package with a bomb inside.

Bomb experts from the police, together with personnel from the Maritime police, Coast Guard and the Philippine Ports Authority secured MV Sto Pacilo for six hours but found no bomb in the vessel, according to SPO4 Eutiquio Jandan, deputy station commander of the Maritime police here.

MV Sto Pacilo departed from Bgao Port at around 6 p.m. Tuesday. At around 9 p.m., while the vessel was cruising in the vicinity of Sarios Island in the Visayan Sea, Ledesma received the message from the Philippine Coast Guard in Bgao, which attributed the information to Bgao City Mayor Franklin Quijano.

Ledesma then advised the Coast Guard in Dumaguete, the nearest port, for assistance. MV Sto Pacilo docked at the Dumaguete Port at around 12:30 a.m. of Wednesday.

Jandan said Ledesma then calmly announced to the passengers the threat and told them not to panic and to disembark from the vessel calmly but quickly. The passengers were brought to the passengers' shed of the port here while the authorities inspected the vessel.

Jandan said the joint team inspected all the baggage in the vessel for five hours but found no bomb. Sto Pacilo left the port of Dumaguete for Iloilo at around 5 a.m.

Some 39 Sto Domo sightseers at ports following the burning of a Super Ferry ship that was scuttled to terrorists after Abu Sayyaf bandit leaders claimed responsibility for the ship fire.

Rivoja Amarado, PDI Pinpoint Bureau

Yet another bet held by rebels

BUTUAN CITY—About 40 heavily armed communist rebels briefly held a mayoral candidate and his entire slate while on their way to campaign in a rebel-controlled village in Loreto, Agusan del Sur on Wednesday morning.

The hostage-taking took place barely a week after the rebels held hostage, then later released, a reelectionist mayor in Surigao del Sur.

Chief Insp. Alberto Olarte, Caraga police director, told the Inquirer that Loreto mayoral aspirant Romeo Magallon and his party had finished campaigning in Kasampaan Village and were on their way to Sitio Talingo in Barangay Ita, Nyota when the rebels blocked their way around 10:15 a.m.

The rebels have been demanding permits to campaign from Nora Magallon, the administration candidate in Loreto town, but the candidate has not paid a single centavo, according to Olarte.

Olarte said Magallon, incumbent Mayor Rolando Reyes, who is running for vice mayor and candidates for councilor Esmeraldo Alvarez Jr., Amado Lycada Jr., Arturo to Pario, Virgilio Rubio, William Go, Betty Magda, Rolando Evasco and Shelly Jakay were later released after they handed the firearms of their security escorts to the rebels.

"The rebels [got the firearms] because they could not pay 20% [to] NPA, and released them," Olarte said.

He said the rebels, led by a certain Ka Dodo, bagged, fled with the security escorts' three M-16 rifles, an Ingram, a .45 pistol and one shotgun.

Olarte said Magallon's group continued with their campaign after the hostage taking.

The guerrillas earlier held hostage the mayor of Talacogon town in Bukidnon.

The mayor was released after P500,000 was paid to the rebels as permit-to-campaign fee.

The guerrillas' detractors had condemned what they said was the 30% extortion from politicians. Franklin Lofgardi, PDI Mindanao Bureau

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SPORTS

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Domingo opens hefty Tour lead

By Marc Anthony Reyes

CABANATUAN CITY—Enrique Domingo salvaged second place for the day despite a broken handle post and extended a sizeable overall lead over Rhyan Tingcuhig after the eighth stage of the Air21 Tour Pilipinas bikathon yesterday.

Although finishing more than three minutes behind stage winner Joel Calderon, the veteran Domingo, the Premier skipper, spurred a seven-minute, 19-second margin over Tingcuhig, who finished third for the 144-km drive from Dagupan City.

"I wanted to win the stage but when my handle post broke down (to Cuizada, Narvin Ariza), I concentrated on finishing the race without any trouble," said the 28-year-old Domingo, who started the day just 11 seconds behind Tingcuhig.

Calderon, second in the seventh lap behind Cuizada yesterday, Dany Pelaila, stunned many from an eight-man lead pack that included Domingo and Tingcuhig and rode 3 hours to throw down 37 minutes and 20 seconds, also with an ADO.

The 31-year-old Calderon was simply rewarded for his breakaway win as the Best on Bike rider came out of nowhere to take third place overall, 9:56 behind Domingo.

Calderon, who accounted for the country's lone cycling gold in the mountain bike division of last year's SEA Games in Vietnam, dropped to fourth overall, 12:40 off the pace.

The rest of the top 10 for also changed with rookie Tomas Martinez (12:49 behind) taking fifth, followed by Marcelo Tumon (13:05), Albert Primero (13:14), Jamil Bernardino (13:47), Joseph Millanes (13:52) and Renato Dolino (14:09).

Domingo paced the eight-man lead pack that was formed when the peloton entered Malolipuit, Tumauini, Isabela with two men—Calderon, Tingcuhig, Fernando Magno (Solid, Virgilio Esperto (Best in Bike), Bernie Ildefo (Pembuelo), rookie Orlie Villanueva (Solid) and Joseph Millanes (Premier).

"Inviting the pace is tiring," said Domingo, who advanced his's more interested in winning the team crown and the sprint title. The team champion gets P1 million, while the overall individual winner gets P200,000. The sprint King wins P50,000.

"They only give prizes to the top three in the individual category this year," noted Domingo, whose lead is trimmed down to 28 minutes ahead of the second-running Best on Bike Ho is also on top of the sprints race after winning 11 intermediate sprints so far.

Tingcuhig, the PLDT captain who placed fourth last year, is supposed to bid for the yellow jersey in today's ninth stage that will include a major climb through Dalton Pass on the way to Baguio City.

That's bad news for Domingo, who had difficulty defending the jersey in uphill climbs many times in the past.

"I'm not worried," said Domingo in Filipino. "In fact, I don't think about it at all."

Calderon said he was egged on by his teammate while passing Barangay Lower in his hometown.

"Sabi nga sa pinanggalingan ko sa ang pagpapahinga, (That's why I decided to go all out for the win)," said Calderon, who was welcomed by wife Belinda and 2-year-old son Alec at the capitol of Nueva Ecija.

Abandoning this year's Tour are Pharex, Shell Bell, Cafemedi, Lamvinhdac, Summit and Iloilo.

A BOTTLE of water handed out to Joseph Millanes (93) by a team supporter stirs a pack that includes Domingo (91), Tingcuhig (91), Villanueva (45) and stage winner Calderon (third from right). JOEY MANLOZA

Dalton Pass tests KOM front-runners

THE CLIMBERS again take centerstage in today's ninth stage as rest of the action-set in the Summit Water King of the Mountain (KOM) race awaits the field in the demanding Dalton Pass, that mountain road linking Central Luzon and Cagayan Valley.

"It's going to be more exciting from here on in," said Sophia Abarca, product manager of Summit, the official drinking water of the Tour Pilipinas 2004.

Summit, the country's leading natural drinking water, and Bell No Bell, two-time-mount Asia Brewery Inc. products, are involved in the ongoing Tour with the latter making waste in Thursday's eighth stage from Dagupan City to Cabanatuan City through Joel Calderon's stage victory.

In today's 148-km grind from Cabanatuan City to Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, Lloyd Reynderson and Allwin Pelenio will battle it out to keep the lead in the Summit Water KOM although erstwhile front-runners Frederick Siluriano and Eusebio Quiñones will be out to spoil their bids.

The Summit Water KOM race offers P50,000 to the winner at the end of the 17-stage Tour on May 2.

Rhum Riders still upbeat despite odds

CABANATUAN—While the Isuzu have not gone their way early in the Air21 Tour Pilipinas 2004, the Isuzu-ay Rhum Riders remain upbeat with the crowd cruising behind Chris Decasan of their team say-ale spree.

After the flu-stricken Israel Quintelo somersaulted after in defense of his individual championship, the Rhum Riders found themselves in a very deep hole.

From last place Tuesday, Tandang gained some ground, finishing third in the race to climb two places in the standings to 10th.

"The race continues to ride with a lot of fighting heart," said Tandang delegation head Larry Li.

Gin Kings end Siot's agony by routing Aces

By Manang Carallo, Contributor

PASEO PROCLAIM CITY—You won't lose them off.

Del Tangonguan finally won a rough of Barangay Cimbres last night as the Kings broke away from Alaska for a 109-94 victory in the Fifth team Matador Fiesta Conference.

Rhyk Cagulyo spearheaded a varied offensive lore to the first half and Pete Mook was at the forefront when the Kings returned for the second half to power Cimbres to its fourth win in 11 games.

The solid individual circle to the Cimbres organization on Tangonguan ere snapped out of a personal no with his first win in seven games since taking over from Allen Castillo.

Alaska, now with a six-game losing streak in out-of-town games, dropped into a tie for second with elle Cuna Cola at 7-4. The lave have not won outside of Metro Manila since Nov. 16, 2003.

GINEBRA 109— Cagulyo 28, Mook 15, Reyes 14, Ambrosi 14, Castro 10, Jarin 8, Tangonguan 7, Cabarrubias 4, Lukban 0.

ALASKA 94— Young 28, Alabi 11, Cortez 11, Fonti 6, Arnaiz 6, Gabaj 5, Pondi, Tenorio 4, White 1, Padilla 1

Quarters: 23-16; 52-51; 77-68; 109-94.

Mariano stuns GM

ILIJAN International Master Nelson Mariano II upset 13th seed Grandmaster Ashot Anastasian (Elo 2607) of Armenia to retain his total to a perfect 5 points and share the lead in the tough 6th Dubai Open Chess Championship at the Dubai Chess and Culture Club.

Mariano (Elo 2414), was tied with top seed Super GM Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu (Elo 2692) of Romania, third seed Super GM Alexkiya Moiseenko (Elo 2657) of Azerbaijan and 20th seed GM Yetkin Dilaveroff (Elo 2542) of Switzerland Wednesday's round.

The 30-year-old Mariano will handle white against Moiseenko, who outplayed 24th seed GM Merab Gagunashvili (Elo 2562) of Georgia.

IM Rachi Andres settled for a draw with GM Surya Shekhar Ganguly of India and landed in the group of 2.5 pointers. Also in Bernardino, Cesar Gaviola

PSC puts emphasis on Olympic funding

FOUR boxers, three jins, three rowers, two taekwon-dos and six fencers are the early beneficiaries of the "Go for Gold Medal in Athens!" Go GMG! Project of the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC).

The 20 athletes were endorsed by their respective National Sports Associations to the PSC, chaired by Eric Buhain, to take part in the project aimed at providing support to Filipino athletes seeking Olympic berths and almost giving those who have already qualified their training requirements and foreign exposure as part of their buildup for the coming Olympic Games in Greece set Aug. 13-29.

Buhain yesterday ordered the release of PC millions to 19 NSAs as part of the PSC's pledge to prioritize funding requirements, in line with the Go GMG! Project.

Last month, the PSC released P11 million to 20 NSAs representing swimmers, tennis, training equipment and foreign exposure.

Buhain said the release of funds to NSAs will continue on a monthly basis until all obligations and receivables have been settled by the agency, as well as funding for the Go GMG Project.

Boxing, among those being counted on as a possible producer of the country's first ever Olympic gold, will participate in the third and last Olympic qualifying tournament for Asia-and-Oceania boxers. Jerusalem Ladon, Gerchert Bauadre and Roelie Gamo or Aidan Leslie are to leave for Pakistan to compete in the May 5-13 event.

RP lady fencer bows to world's No. 31

MEZI Joyce Angeles of the Philippines proved no match to world No. 31 Claudia Sagstuven in yesterday's women's individual foil of the 2004 Shanji Asian Fencing Championships in the Philippine arena.

With four wins and one loss earlier, Angeles, a 18th pandemonium graduate, barely outdated a chinese lone to Sagstuven, who prevailed 15-14 in the quarterfinals.

Angeles first won over Singaporean Natalia Mohamedgutteres, 15-8, to advance to the top 16 before earning into Sagstuven.

"She did very well, considering that she's one of the newest members of the national team," said Coby Jimenez, Philippine fencing and boxing Association secretary-general.

Filipinos Mickey Mascarinda, Roberto Gonzales, Jeremiah Bagsit, Reporto Tindo, and Rodwell Cardoz Jr. were eliminated right in their first matches outside Ramil Ita, whose bout was not immediately available.

Kim Photo Jin of Korea and Tan Li of China were the event's and tournament's foil.

The individual saber leagues today with RP bet Philly Mendoza expected to counter Saudi Ivanca humbling defeat in the Asian qualifier.

STAGE 8 RESULTS

7. J. Calderon (Bike) by Bert 2:01:07 min 21 sec.
8. J. Santiago (Pasteur) 3:08 min behind 9. R. Tanjang (PGT) same time
10. S. Villanueva (Lyric) same
11. F. Angeles (Bike) 5 min
12. J. Whitten (Pasteur) 5:16 min; 13. Rodel (Pandacan) 6. V. Tejada (Bike) same time
14. R. Pelayo (Bike) 6:31 min; 15. M. Ramirez (Pasteur) 8. J. Sandoval (Bike) same time
16. E. Ramirez (Bike) 9:02 min; 17. R. Bonifacio (Pandacan) 9. J. Rodel (Bike) same time
18. C. Ramirez (Pasteur) 10. J. Ramirez (Pandacan) 11. F. Ramirez (Pasteur) 12. J. Ramirez (Pandacan) 13. J. Ramirez (Pasteur) 14. J. Ramirez (Pandacan) 15. J. Ramirez (Pasteur) 16. J. Ramirez (Pandacan) 17. J. Ramirez (Pasteur) 18. J. Ramirez (Pandacan) 19. J. Ramirez (Pasteur) 20. J. Ramirez (Pandacan)

Welcoat repulses Hapee five in OT

By Trina Sorio

CHRISTIE Tolentino hit back-to-back triples at crunch-time to power previously Welcoat Paints to a 79-75 overtime victory over defending champion Hapee Toothpaste yesterday in the 2004 PBL Unity Cup at the Pasig Sports Center.

Tolentino's trey enabled the Paintmasters to rise a 71-68 deficit and eventually fill them to their fifth straight win.

The Sixth Starbloc, who rallied from 10 points down to force the overtime through three straight triples by Emerson Ortiz, dropped in three several lens in the games.

Tolentino, who returned to the Paintmasters' fold after a brief stint in the PBA, wound up with 22 points, behind the 23 of fellow-former pro Jovelen Tangkay.

Earlier, Tim Manuel Hano showed in defensive pressure in sending a come-from-behind 86-81 triumph over Surefoot FBT.

The Water Force, who trailed by as many as 13 points late in the second quarter, powered an 83-81 lead by preventing the Tigers from scoring in their last five possessions to improve their second-running record to 6-1.

AL Maggay of Manila's Navotas and Mark Victoria of Bic Star dispute the rebound in their game Tuesday. Star Star pyrosbot.

Superals join RP's jungolf campaign

WELLS Aspeal and his sisters, Crystal Beth and Princess, all made it to the country's team to the Gil Lanny Junior World championships in San Diego, California, after studying the opposition in the Samsung-sponsored national qualifier at the Sherwood Hills and Riviera courses recently.

Aspeal topped his unchallenged victory in boys' Class E (11-12 years) with a 1-under-par 71 for a 54-stroke victory. He earned a chance to make up for last year's sorry miss in the Junior World where he led after two rounds only to collapse on the last day.

His sisters also qualified with Princess shooting out with an 81-227 to rule the girls' Class B by 14 while young Princess enlisted a 25 shot win with her 75-215.

The team of last year's campaign will also be back to spearhead the campaigns as Jayde Iggay, Sonny Smith and Miguel Tolentino garnered their way to easy victories in the country-opening as the third leg of the Lanny Philippines Junior Golf Tour and post major battle for the International Committee Invitational Series.

Iggay fired a one-over 73 for the girls' Class A plate, Antilles shot a 68 to win for 26 strokes in girls' Class D while Tolentino sided Class B by 14 shots.

Allen Tee pulled off a shock win in boys' Class E, Cyrus Rodrigues emerged as the over Class C/D while 28 contenders entered for title in Class E to join the qualifiers.

SPORTSWATCH

Boutists knocks out IBF champ

TEXMEX Day "Sweet Boxer" Bautista downed reigning IBF Pan Pacific minifly champion Pongky Wonsaapan with a technical knockout win in the third round of their scheduled 10-round fight on Indonesia Boxing night. The 31-year-old Bautista, a former Lucena City native fighting out of the AAA Gym in Cabanatuan sportsman Tony Bautista, dominated the Indonesian champ, who took a barrage of punches until the referee stopped the bout at the one minute mark of the third round. The win now the odds in eight bouts for the contender Bautista, who in some being poured for a May 29 fight against a former champion. Another Filipino champ who was in the Ubin "ring" Marcos Maidana who lost the inside that he was robbed by Wonsaapan's scorecards (29-1).

Robert Lagumbay

PPBL moves up to junior bantam

THE PHILIPPINE Pro Boxing League (PPBL) moves up to the junior bantamweight level with a couple of semifinal bouts at the Manalaysay City Sports Complex. PEP junior bantamweight champion Cris Bernadino fights Mark Cuizon in the featured bout, while PBL 115-lb. champ Joseph De Campo takes on contender Jerome Bernal. Bernadino Pace in the co-main event. The PPBL, a unique shoulder-less tournament supported by Tanduay Rhum and Lucky Strike, is unsure every Wednesday at 8 p.m. on Aksyon 15. In its previous win, the 15 seen on the television stampeded to over more Nielsen Ratings.

Kid Dings pool finals in Aklan

TOP athlete's riders score in the fight against illegal drugs with the guard's split today at the 1st Governor's Cup Open Pool Tournament at the Kalibo Sports Complex. Kid Dings Mayor Dagdag under Philippine Director General Jhet Chiong business forwarded. Veteran international Rodolfo "Boy Samson" Luat has agreed to grace the occasion to help deliver the anti-drug message. Main bonded guard Efren "Bata" Reyes was named regards his could not attend the affair due to a previous commitment in Manila. Aside from fighting drug addiction, Luat, a world-ranker in the 2000 Cardiff World Pool Championship, will play exhibition matches and help in the assembling commission of the well-participated interbarangay pool competition.

Search for next racing superstar is on

THE FIRST stage of the GT Toa Drive Challenge "Search for the Next Racing Superstar," a four-stage rally-based sprint, has begun with competitions at the Trans Sport Show 2004 at the Megatrade Hall of SM Megamall B. The search is being held in partnership with Land Transportation Office Commissioner Sonny Sotto. The first of four stages is The Vios Factory Video Game Challenge, a game premiere among world-class racing drivers who need to display their different. Entrance fee for the Toa Factory Challenge is P1.00.

Nat'l bouldering circuit set at SM

THE NATIONAL amateur sport of bouldering goes national starting April 24 at SM North Edsa with the staging of the first leg of the Sea to Sea Bouldering Association of the Philippines (Sea2Summit) Bouldering competition which opened up all ages and skill levels in the country. Bouldering is a form of rock climbing sport without the use of a safety harness. A padded crash mat is laid underneath for protection in fall-off. "Last year, we only had one leg held in bouldering championship in two key cities (Cebu and Davao). But this year, Sea2Summit Bouldering Series elevated the bouldering to a higher level," said Jessy Cuarto, who is organizing the event sponsored by Victorinox Swiss Army Knives and SM Malls. He noted that Filipino sports climbers have done well in international competitions like the Asian Games, where Climbers reached the Women's Division.

Pasay 4-cock derby today

MORE than 16 fighting cocks are up today the "4-Cock Derby Pasa sa May Sa pamamagitan" gala anniversary starting at 9 a.m. today at the Pasay City Cockpit. A cash prize of P250,000 is at stake in the derby sponsored by Talgapalan Farmers Cooperative Mkt. Area, Sagpaan II Multi-Purpose and Sagpaan Consumer MPC assembling by PSC pet managers Dean Gonzales, Eric delos Reyes and Rodolfo Blanco. Only Pasay-based members of Pasay Cockpit Conference are allowed to enter the derby, according to the organizers. Proceeds of which will be donated to the Cruz Catholic Foundation of Malabang, Mandaluyong. Interested cockers are invited to stay in another 4-cock derby hosted by cockers Bienvenido Lee on April 30. For reservations, call (632) 833-1300, 843-1000 and 833-6702.

Golf's new hero

"If I go a three-some on either going to the final round. And then you emerge victorious after the smoke of battle has cleared.

What does that make of you?

Superman.

Perhaps. But, how can one best describe the recent victory of Tiger Woods in the Masters? Does that had a whopping total prize of $4.1 million?

Look, this is no ordinary golf tournament. This is part of the USPGA, the world's No. 1 factory of the greatest players of the sport. Virtually all the men of the game were there, including 2004 Masters runner up and two-time US Open champion Ernie Els, $91 to $1 million, who finished two strokes behind Ozik.

Ozik was never considered a contender. He was nine off leader Ted Purdy and three off Ernie Els with one round left.

Ozik shot a final-day 64 to Purdy's 71 and forged a playoff. Ozik, who earlier had 72,69,69, won it on the fifth hole on a five-foot birdie.

"Forward Ozik shooting seven under today man, give me a break," said Purdy. "That was pretty good."

Ozik's victory was the greatest comeback in the PGA, surpassing the old mark of eight strokes overhauled in a 33 men's crown.

The only greatest rally better than Ozik's feat that is recognized by the US Tour is Scottsman Paul Lawrie's win from 10 strokes down in the 1999 British Open. It was also a playoff win, after Frenchman Jean Van de Velde's historic 72nd hole collapse.

Before Ozik's feat, the previous great comebacks include the victory in the 1956 Masters by Jack Burke Jr. over Ben Hogan, the U.C. Open last year by Craig Stadler.

Seemingly, Ozik was meant to win it.

Purdy finished his final nine holes unchecked technically without a bogey. Surprisingly, Ozik, and Ozik, Purdy had the chance to win it outright on the final regulation hole, but he missed a 18-foot birdie to open for his 71 after previous rounds of 69-67-69. He had pulled his putt.

"I found my way" I was playing today, just became I was trying to make pars," said Purdy. "That's not my line."

Way to lose.

Anyhow, Purdy had played defensively on the last day, his two-stroke lead to be granted his huge lead. Dare to take the tournament. Truly this was no feat.

It happens that at times, in this crazy game of golf, we tend to be too cautious when we feel victory is almost at hand. We become conservative instead of being aggressive as we our game plan the day before, or in the early goings if the contest was not for 18 holes.

The correct attitude should always be that we play our normal game all throughout, sticking to a set offensive, whether we are comfortably ahead of the pack or just ahead by a stroke. Changing tactics or strategy in the course of the game usually proves disastrous, as it's hard to change horses in mid-stream as the cliche goes.

Tom Purdy had said it himself: "I was just trying to make pars."

That handicap as manifested by his last round, when he was likely he needed to sink the winning birdie—a "makeable" 18-footer on his 72nd hole—the gods of golf bailed, as if telling the American ranked 166th in the world: "You are not worthy of this crown."

In winning his third career PGA title, his first since winning the same event in 2000, Ozik pocketed $900,000, moving him into the Top 10 on the money list with more than $1.5 million this year.

Ozik, 36, 43 in the world, has suddenly thrust himself as the new hero among golf's ornamental fourth in the dead.

The unsinkable one, I must say.

HASTEMEDE. If you still don't have tickets for the UBEC Universal Reality Combat Championship, available tomorrow, April 24, at the Cuneta Pilipino Amphitheater in Quezon City, you can purchase them at Red Corner (tel. 8479599) and Rainbow Productions (7315745 or 7315695). Hurry up. Seated there are only a few tickets left.

CONSERVATION

Wonder what this plastic bag is doing on a fire hydrant on Gonzaga Park Street in Bagulo City? The hydrant was leaking water and an unidentified concerned citizen thought of putting the plastic to reduce the leak.

14 more W. Visayas areas tagged election 'hot spots'

ILOILO CITY—Fourteen more election hot spots were identified in Western Visayas as the May 10 election nears.

The newly identified areas of concern (AOCs) brought the total number of AOCs in the region to 31, the Philippine National Police here said.

A locality is considered an AOC if it has a history of election-related violence, presence of rebels and the existence of intense political rivalry.

Iloilo province has the most AOCs with 21.

These are Banate City and the towns of Alimodian, Balfan, Balasan, Barotac Nuevo, Bingawan, Calinog, Dueñas, Igbaras, Janiuay, Lambunao, Leganes, Lemery, Leon, Maasin, Miag-ao, San Dionisio, San Enrique, San Joaquin, San Rafael and Tubungan.

Negros Occidental has seven—the towns of Candoni, Cauayan, Hinoba-an and Ilog, and the cities of Cadiz, Escalante, Sagay and Silay.

Antique has five AOCs—the towns of Bugasong, Culasi, Libacan, San Remigio, and Belison, Tapaz has three—Roxas City and the towns of Cuartero and Dumarao.

Aklan has two with AOC in Makat while there was none in the island province of Guimaras and Bacolod City.

Iloilo City was considered an AOC with 13 of its villages, mostly in the waterfront area, under close police watch. The barangays include Jaro, Mandurriao, City Proper, Pavia, Molo, Arevalo, Mandurriao, Cua-Hughes, Legaspi de la Rama, Mandurriao, Sto. Rosario-Silong, Yulo Arcaya, Veterans Village and Tanza Bonifacio.

Lawyer Victor Ustoles, regional elections supervisor, said the increasing number of hot spots "is not surprising."

Kristee Baryon Jr., PDI Visayas Bureau

Rescue of farms from drought starts

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—At least 140 mobile water pumps have been prepared in some at least 1,370 barangays of Pampanga to help farmers affected by the drought, the chairman of the Kapisanan ng Magkakasama Pilipino (KMP) that Iloilo City and governor were among the places where the administration would campaign hard to help President Macapagal-Arroyo's chances of winning in the May 10 elections.

Iloilo Rep. Arthur Defensor, Lakas-CMD provincial chair, said President Macapagal would win in the city and province because she has a strong organization here and not because of any unlawful means.

"The opposition is rekindling in the dark. They are being surrounded by their own shadows. As it has always been, elections in Iloilo will be peaceful and nobody except probably for a few isolated incidents," he told the Inquirer.

Defensor was reacting to the statement made by Sen. Gloria Ilonga II, KNP campaign manager, over ABS-CBN on Monday that "Iloilo[n]ians] are getting tired of being used as watchdog (family)" Iloilo senator ABD-CBN.

He also named other places in the country where they believed the administration would commit fraud.

Defensor said they do not have to cheat because President Macapagal-Arroyo "will definitely win in Iloilo with a huge margin."

Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas moved from his "irresponsible" statements.

"We're no clowns. Besides, there's no need for any buddy-buddy. Our own surveys show that President Arroyo will win here. We live in reality and she'll win big in Iloilo City," said Treñas, Lakas-CMD chief in the city. Treñas said the Ilonggos reserve for "intelligence."

Iloilo City and province are known buddy-buddy politics. Former Senate President Franklin Drilon and Iloilo Governor Niel Tupas Sr. (Lakas-CMD chief in the city, Treñas said the Ilonggos reserve for "intelligence."

In Iloilo province, two gubernatorial candidates—incumbent Niel Tupas of the Liberal Party and Iloilo Rep. Oscar Garin of Lakas-CMD—are both running for President Macapagal.

and the National Irrigation Administration, came after officials of the Regional Masagana Irrigation System (Ramis) decided to shut off the "Pulilan" or the Quiot's main water source since last week.

Farmers in the neighboring towns of Candaba in Pampanga and San Miguel in Bulacan relied on the Ramis and Longos rivers for irrigation.

Gonzales said some 800 hectares of rice land in these two towns are almost parched. The crops are set to flower sometime next month and needed to be irrigated before the new season starts next month.

If the standing crops in the 1,370 barangays are damaged, he said, the region stands to lose about 157,800 tons of rice.

But, 65 percent of the palay ready for harvesting in 15,000 hectares in the terrain at the tailend of the Angat Dam—Bulacan, Calumpit and Hagonoy in Bulacan and San Simon in Pampanga—still have enough water and those among farmers of surviving the water shortage, he said.

Gonzales said Nueva Ecija, the region's biggest rice-producing province, is not affected by water shortage and is, in fact, in the peak of harvest.

Agriculture plays to save the early cropping of hybrid rice varieties in 27,000 hectares in Nueva Ecija because the major irrigation water source in the province, the Pantabangan Dam, remains at a normal level.

More seed varieties are going to be used to increase the yield and officer whatever losses the dry spell would cause to the agricultural sector in Central Luzon, Gonzales said.

"There is a strong trend to find other native sources of irrigation," he said.

He noted the competition between some 8,000 farmers who used the Angat Dam water for agricultural production and Metro Manila's 10 million residents who rely on them for domestic water supply. This competition, he said, heightens during this dry season. *Dimitri Dreyfus, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

ROUNDUP

Bus catches fire

ILAGAN, Isabela—A bus burst into flames after it suffered from accidental short circuit in Intramuros on a Friday night, police said. Supt. Rolando Lopez, Isabela police intelligence and investigation chief, said no one was hurt as the 10 passengers of Cielo Liner bus fled. No sacrifice fire was aggravated by a fuel leak.

Filemar Vargas Jr., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Smuggle try foiled

FLORIDABLANCA—Police on April 12 foiled an attempt to smuggle out of the Subic Bay freeport 10 boxes of stun cigarettes. Senior Insp. Danilo Bonlaan, commander of Station 5 here, said the alleged Marlboro cigarettes were found inside a container van bound for Cebu City. Bonlaan identified Gerardo Dalabon Dacanlalay Jr., Vietnam and they confiscated the cigarettes but police detained petitioner after the van's driver, Apolinario Bilvenes, failed to produce any permit.

Alan Bandonill, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Wildlife center opened

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—Officials of the Wildlife Network/Wildlife Foundation and the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority launched the formal Rescue and Rehabilitation Center (ARRC) here recently to protect, preserve and manage the wildlife and forest resources this former American naval base. Representatives of the WRN Foundation, a non-stock organization led by the founders of Ocean Adventure, signed a memorandum of agreement with the SBMA to establish the rescue center to care for sick, injured and confiscated wild animals here. The foundation will occupy a 1,500-square meter area at the eastern quadrangle area here for the establishment of the ARRC.

Alan Bandonill, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Man kills child

GUIMARAS ISLAND, Guimaras—A 6-year-old child was accidentally killed by his own father in Barangay Mahalaon on Wednesday during shooting incident with the father's brother. Police identified the victim as Ronald Mendez, a village day care student. Investigators disclosed that the suspect, Ruenor, and his wife, Edmerlyn, were having an argument that turned into a fight inside their house. The suspect grabbed a bad pipe and struck his brother with it three times, but missed. Ronald was hit instead. He was taken to the Iloilo City Provincial Hospital where he died.

Iloilo Bulletin Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

41 jueteng men nabbed

LUCENA CITY—Police grabbed at least 41 jueteng collectors in separate raids in Quezon province on Monday and Tuesday, police said. Senior Supt. Leo Mercado, provincial police director, said the seven anti-vice units grabbed 20 collectors from the town of Sariaya, Lucena and Tayabas and Infanta in Quezon province on Monday. Police also arrested 21 jueteng collectors in Lucena and Tayabas on Tuesday. Mercado said the raids were conducted after police operatives received reports that some barangay officials were receiving payoffs from the operations. Police operatives report said jueteng operators that are "kumpadre style" have been forging harmony among themselves on campaign funds for synchronized local election officials. But the campaign against jueteng operations is strongest in the Maguindanao province, presented there by Governor Andal Ampatuan Jr.

Butch Mabini Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

KNP team survives mishap

SAGAY CITY—A media affairs of the Kilusan ng Magkakasangay Pilipino and her driver survived a car accident in Barangay Carmelay-Cadiz, Bel Gallego, Carmelites but at about 4:30 p.m. yesterday while on their way to Bago City from Silay City. Police investigation disclosed that Gallego's car, a 2003 Toyota Revo, collided with an oncoming car, a Toyota Hi-Ace commuter van. In the right when he allegedly saw a motorcar crossing the Quezon Highway. The victims sustained bodily injuries and broken clavicle bones. Gallego's car was totally damaged. The victims were rushed to the hospital after the accident happened but now the police where the bus crossing and were taken to the Negros Occidental Provincial Hospital in Bago City. Traffic was delayed for several hours as the Toyota Revo and several others were being collided with an incoming truck on March 9.

Jose Hernandez Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Ancestral lands given

CALAPAN CITY—National Council of Indigenous Peoples Commissioner Lagtam Pawag, the first Mangyan NCIP commissioner, said here that the NCIP has awarded certificates of ancestral domain titles to Buntod, Kalahanbuhay City, Mangyan in Occidental Mindoro province and Dorak, Palawan, including ancestral waters. Some 1,150 hectares of ancestral land in Oriental Mindoro province are expected to be approved before April ends, he said.

Mahmud Ebrahim, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Lakas execs say no need to cheat

By Raj Panilla
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Top officials of the Lakas Christian Muslim Democrat in Iloilo dismissed as "preposterous" the claim of Oscar Rodriguez of Magkabalikang Pilipino (KNP) that Iloilo City and province were among the places where the administration would campaign hard to help President Macapagal-Arroyo's chances of winning in the May 10 elections.

Iloilo Rep. Arthur Defensor, Lakas-CMD provincial chair, said President Macapagal would win in the city and province because she has a strong organization here and not because of any unlawful means.

"The opposition is rekindling in the dark. They are being surrounded by their own shadows. As it has always been, elections in Iloilo will be peaceful and nobody except probably for a few isolated incidents," he told the Inquirer.

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In Iloilo province, two gubernatorial candidates—incumbent Niel Tupas of the Liberal Party and Iloilo Rep. Oscar Garin of Lakas-CMD—are both running for President Macapagal.

16 Negros sugar industry labor groups back GMA

By Carla P Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Sixteen labor organizations in Negros Occidental composed mainly of sugar workers and farmers signed a manifestation of support for the presidential bid of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The group said the Macapagal administration has presented achievements that proved to be very beneficial for the interest and protection of the workers and dependents of the sugar industry.

They cited the President for the issuance of the sugar Agriculture Competitiveness Enhancement Fund amounting to P600 million that benefited the mill districts, the transfer of raw and refined sugar from the temporary exclusion list to sensitive list of the South East Asian Agreement, and for issuing Executive Order 180 to effect a preferential rate of 40 percent for sugar products.

They also said the President's administration was responsible for the operation of the Sugar Board, composed of the Board based tariff on sugar from 50 percent to 40 percent, intervention of the National Food Authority in the stabilization of domestic prices; and the reclassification of all products containing 65 percent sugar or premixes.

They also hailed the appointment of Secretary Angelo Reyes as the anti-smuggling czar.

PRESIDENT Macapagal leading senior voters during a campaign in San Pedro, Laguna, drives the support of workers in the sugar industry for her pro-sugar industry policies

The signatories to the manifesto were Bukidnon Sugar, national president of the United Sugar Farmers Organization and Allied Services-Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP); Tulio de la Cruz Jr., president of the National Congress of Unions in the Sugar Industry of the Philippines (Nacusip-TUCP); Renato Bonagua, national president of the Workers Independent Union of the Philippines; Randy Bonguilo, national president of the Trade Union of Filipino Workers; Jovelo Dizon, national coordinator of the Congress of Independent Unions; and Jesus Jesus Isaac Labor Union.

Ronald Espinilla, national executive vice president of the Philippine Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (Bacusa)-TUCP; Edilbe Caseres, deputy secretary of the Pentawal Labor Organization-ALU; Alberto Tibus, president of the Bacolod Mercantile Medical Center Laotane Bar, president of the Association of Negros Loop, Inc., Marcelo Tillanen, chair of the Negros Occidental Sugar Workers Association Inc.; Jhun Matas, president of G.N. and Sons Workers Union; Noel Villarin, president of the Nacusip Hacienda San Vicente de Ferrer-E. Reynald Waves, president of Nacusip Hacienda Caliguisan; Lui Bocobocas, president of Nacusip Hacienda Mercedes Bocas, president of the Pairway Union Marino Fishing Resources Inc. and Marianito Andalan, president of the CSD-ALU-CSDN Isdas Rose Union.

She said the Iloilo' reputation for being "tired" isn't victimized the indigenous group for decades. "There is an Iloilo boy who was accused of being an object-baby Gregorio I. It is in those instances when we should fight for Iloilo rights," she said.

Bro Gene and Aquino's chief function is to organize the transfer of indigenous knowledge from the remaining Iloilo elders to their children and grandchildren. *Vincent Cabreros, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Ibalois seek positions to protect their rights

BAGUIO CITY—Ibalois in the city convened for the first time in 93 years on Wednesday to draw manifesto of rights to try to get their representation into office.

Ibaloi (Ibaloi for 'building place') formed in the contemporary group of elders since the American colonial government displaced their ancestors from the mineralized called highways to build the summer capital in 1909.

The elders said no Ibaloi politician has been elected into office in Baguio in the last 30 years, and they believe this is the reason the city government disregards their rights over their ancestral land existing in Baguio.

The administration of incumbent Mayor Bernardo Vergara considers most ancestral land claims in Baguio as void because of a provision in the 1997 Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) that excludes Baguio from ancestral land deliberations.

Ibaloi say has been protesting Baguio's exclusion since 1995, pointing out that the Ibaloi of Ibaloi landmass Marcos Cordillera have a stake in ancestral lands here.

Cordillera was a 1909 ruling from the United States Supreme Court that granted him rights over land being staked by the American colonial government. This ruling is known as Philippine jurisprudence as the Cordillera Declaration, and is the foundation for Ipra.

The Court of Appeals had ruled that Vergara must submit to the quasi-judicial authority of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in connection with a demolition order he issued against an Ibaloi house standing on an ancestral land claim.

Vergara had sought to overturn an NCIP "cease-and-desist" order last March 17, 2003 directing to demolish the house of Judith Cordis.

The Ibaloi land claims were also put on the spot by the existence of still supposedly spurious land titles that were purchased by the NCIP during the tenures of former President Joseph Estrada in 2001.

Ibalois need to find their voice in government, said Baby Gawa, chair of the Ibaloi and Nueva Cordis Bontoc-ano and an Ibaloi founder.

She said the Ibaloi' reputation for being "tired" isn't victimized the indigenous group for decades. "There is an Ibaloi boy who was accused of being an object-baby Gregorio I. It is in those instances when we should fight for Ibaloi rights," she said.

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Filipino political families 'an octopus'

Continued on A2

"A governor rejoices the end of his legal term, after which the wife or son runs to finish a term. Then the old governor comes back, while the wife or son seeks another office, perhaps accompanied by a sibling who's running in another area. And so on and so forth until the family's tentacles are all over the place," said Abad.

According to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's study of Philippine legislatures, "The Rule Makers: How the Wealthy and Well-born Dominate Congress," from out of 13 representatives in all post-Marcos Congresses, at least three relatives of previous legislators.

In the 11th Congress of 1998, other than current incumbents' kinsmen, six in every 10 of 130 House legislators were members of political clans. Only 42 percent were not from political families, the PCIJ said.

Some political families have been around for at least a century, having begun in politics in the early years of the 20th century when the United States colonial government first introduced elections here.

Take the 1907 Philippine assembly, the country's first elected legislature, as the template for the one hundred years by limiting suffrage to the educated and the propertied, ensuring that elite families would dominate public office for decades to come.

Most durable

The Aquino-Cojuangco clan of Tarlac, the most durable of these dynasties, has been in power for four generations. The maternal lineage of Aquinos's grandfather was a political ally of the revolutionary army and a member of the Malolos Congress of 1898. Former President Corazon Cojuangco Aquino's grandfather served in the first Philippine Assembly of 1907.

Others, like the family of Datus City satchel Ramon S. Dumon Jr., go back even further to the Spanish colonial era, during which members of the cacique elite occupied the lower rungs of the colonial bureaucracy.

Not all political dynasties are founded on the traditional sources of wealth and power, like huge landholdings as in Negros and violence as in Ilocos Sur and Cavite.

Stellar careers, businesses

The Enrile, Ramos and Arroyo clans parlayed stellar careers in the law into public office and dynasty-building. Even by business interests are also a strong impetus to win elective positions as in the case of the fishing-based Jaworski family of Malabon-Navotas and Dalaman.

No are dynasties so entrenched that they live forever. The once powerful "sugar bloc" political families of Western Visayas are being replaced by younger, more dynamic clans, many of them like the Garins of Iloilo deriving their influence from having built successful businesses after politics.

Some dynasties have become so huge and powerful that various members of the kinsmen of all three traditional sources and have split up into competing factions such as the Osmeñas of Cebu City.

Abad considers political clans to be "the root of any political community" and the reason why inequalities persist in Philippine society.

Being thoroughly explosive, political clans use the privileges and resources of public office to perpetuate themselves in power.

Inimical to strong party system

They build coalitions and networks of supporters bound only to them as to molehood during elections. The clan candidate has no need for party networks as the family or clan is his or her party organization. This has been inimical to the development of a strong party system, said Abad.

Dynasticists subvert the family's personal values, machinery and means, thus entering the clans' monopoly of power.

"In a system where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, it is easy for the elite to manipulate power to satisfy private needs," Abad said.

The 1987 Constitution tried to prevent equal opportunity for public office by prohibiting political dynasties. But Congress, confirmed by the political families, has not legislated the enabling law to implement the Constitution's provisions against political dynasties.

Northern Luzon: 12 Ortegas running in May elections

Continued on A2

NORTHERN Luzon politicos Governor Chavit Singson, Ilocos Norte Gov Bongbong Marcos and Rep. Reuyan Sibal-Joson the President company during her campaign in Luna, Ilocos Norte on Thursday.

With 10 members contesting and the 2nd of Isabela, with six, no one can be behind.

The political dominant dynasty in the region are the Marcoses of Ilocos Norte, the Aglipayans of Pangasinan, the Ilalins of Abra and the Bulats of Apayao.

La Union

The Ortega clan of La Union is probably the most formidable of the political families of Northern Luzon, its ascendance having started in 1963 when the patriarch Don Benjamin "Kokoy" Ortega was appointed by the Tall Commission as the first civilian governor of the province. Ortega, a Spanish mestizo born in Cebu, became the first elected governor of La Union in 1992.

In August 2002, the family observed its 100th year of public service. On that occasion, La Union Bishop Antonio Tobias said the centennial was "not for the Ortegas alone but for the people" who have been governed for 100 years and beyond. It is for all of us ... so as to it that part of leadership is training others to succeed capably or even better."

Ortega followed 14 children, 14 of whom would serve La Union either as governors or representatives or would marry spouses who would serve in the military and the judiciary.

From Ortega's 14 children would descend the World Bank boy, the second to the fourth generation who would become governors, congressman, mayors, vice mayors, councilors and village heads of La Union in one and only city.

Ortega's eldest son, Francisco (Boyet) and Joaquin, dominated La Union's politics from the 1980s to the 1990s.

On May 10, at least 12 3rd and 4th generation Ortegas and their in-laws are running for different local posts.

Leading the clan is Gov. Victor Ortega and his brother, 1st district Rep. Manuel Ortega, who are both running for reelection.

Mary Jane Ortega, Victor's wife, is running for her third and final term as mayor of the capital, San Fernando City.

Jonathan Ortiz, son of former Gov. Jude Ortega Ortiz Jr., is running for reelection as provincial board member. Jon Ortega, a brother of Victor and Manuel, is also running for board member.

Five Ortega clan members are running for election into the 12-member San Fernando city council: Mario Lacsamana, Emmanuel Ortega, son of Manuel; Francisco "Kit" Ortega Jr., another brother of Victor and Manuel; John Deon, and board member Julio Ortega.

Vice Gov. Augusto Aurea Viana, an Ortega in-law, is running for reelection. His brother, Francisco, is running for councilor of San Fernando.

The Ilumpit family is another prominent La Union clan.

Rep. Tomas Dumpit is running for reelection in the second district. His son, Thomas "Paolo" Dumpit, is challenging Governor Ortega's reelection bid.

Representative Dumpit's daughter, Ms. Theresa Dumpit-Michelena, is running for mayor of Agoo town. Dumpit-Michelena on election has disqualified Dumpit-Michelena on residency grounds but the case is on appeal.

Ilocos Sur

The Singson clan has 10 members running for various posts in its quest for continued dominance of Ilocos Sur politics.

Governor Ceo Luis "Chavit" Singson, the clan patriarch, is attempting to regain his old post. He is being challenged by his cousin-in-law, former board member Eldy Bantug, and Sara Sotto, the Alliance chair Isidro Cordero.

Singson's second cousin, Ilocos Sur Rep. Eric Singson, is running for reelection in the second district.

The family's dominance of Ilocos Sur politics began in 1971 when Chavit and elder brother Antonio "Tonong" were congressman and Vigan mayor, respectively. Chavit defeated the late Governor Conrado Estrella III.

Singson's second cousin, Ilocos Sur Rep. Eric Singson, is running for reelection in the second district.

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Chavit's brother, Ilocos Sur Vice Gov. Jeremias Singson, is running for reelection as provincial board member while Eric's son, Ryan, is running for mayor of Candon

Bishop hits Pagcor's use of funds for GMA

To paragraph 8 ›

Pagcor also incurred "substantial expenses" for the food and transportation of barangay leaders from all over the country during their monthly meetings since the start of the election campaign, and for the "extraordinary dole-outs" for these community leaders tasked with the campaign for the President, according to documents from employees of the gaming firm.

The papers implicated Gma's allegedly illegal use of funds going to banks to finance the Hyatt-gate campaign.

Edward "Eraño" King, Pagcor's chief media officer, said the agency had distributed more than 1,000 motorcycles and an equal number of sewing machines to the barangays in the country over the past two years supposedly as "livelihood projects" but on the requests of ruling officials.

"That's part of our 'Bolong Barangay' program," he said in a phone interview. "Of course, we spend so many millions on projects that are do for the government. But that's because the President has directed us to bring Pagcor to the people."

Employees of Pagcor said the 130 motorcycles that Pagcor bought cost P3.26 million, while the mobile-unit cost P5.25 million and the 10,000 sewing machines, P38.67 million.

A check with the Ford sales office showed that the cheapest double cab Ford Ranger pick-up costs P720,000. The Pagcor bought 50 of these vehicles, which would have cost them at least P36 million at the rate.

'What's wrong with that?'

King said Pagcor turned only the Ford Ranger pick-ups to its employees for their customary welfare operations, not to be assigned.

He admitted that Pagcor had set up many rolling stations to some parts of Metro Manila, Rizal, Cavite, Batangas and Laguna since December last year to bring "possible senior to senior-ize areas."

"That's part of our 'Pamilya' project. What's wrong with that?" he said.

King maintained that these projects were undertaken to provide assistance to people living in impoverished areas, and not to boost Mr. Macapagal's candidacy.

He denied that Pagcor employees were being tapped to provide warm bodies during Mr. Macapagal's campaign rallies.

Personal gain

Cruz said that the Macapagal administration and its appointees to the Pagcor had been milking the agency for their personal and political gain.

Pagcor Chair Efraim Genuino, known to be a good friend of the President's husband, Jose Miguel Arroyo, had also approved the purchase of P18.4 million worth of computers for the use of 13 Pagcor officials, the documents showed.

The Pagcor board also recently increased the retirement pay of board members from P600,000 per year of service to a flat rate of P7 million for those who had served at least one year, and approved additional insurance compensation for many subsequent years.

Malacañang Palace officials are also foisting their government cars and boarding houses in the employees.

P1 million daily

A summary for the supply of 11 gas coffee worth P1 million daily has been awarded to the siblings of Pagcor president and chief operating officer Myrtle Poncino without bidding, according to the summary of allegations of mismanagement by Pagcor officials, which included the appointment of relatives and friends of Pagcor officials to the agency.

The softer concessions, which amounts to P365 million a year, was renewed to beyond 2006 even before it expired "in anticipation of possible changes in management after the elections," the summary said.

GMA knows what's going on

Cruz said it was "almost impossible" that Mr. Macapagal was not aware of what was going on at Pagcor. The archbishop said that he had informed Ms Macapagal "through a very close friend of the President" of the press mismanagements at the agency.

He also received a copy of all the documents pertaining to the mismanagement of Pagcor on Feb. 14. He transmitted the materials to the Office of the President on Mar. 1 but was told two weeks ago that the matter had been referred to the department concerned.

Scared

"I did not want to make noise. I thought I would give the President a chance to correct it (Pagcor mismanagement) so I made the matter much less but nothing happened. I think I will do not know-ing what happened," Cruz said.

He said that he was scared to come out with the information against Pagcor's top brass because "many people disappear in Pagcor or are hurt," alluding to Edgar Bersales, a Pagcor employee who mysteriously disappeared after leaking a video showing he-ars Presidents Joseph Estrada playing to a Pagcor casino.

Not for or against

"That is not my worry," Cruz said when asked how he thought the report would affect the President's credibility.

"My intention is for Pagcor [to be cleaned up.] I did not do this for her or against her," he said, adding that "everybody knows that (the President) is spending government money)."

Mr Macapagal is also accused of using the road asset tax and the excise tax on new cars levied on her campaign.

The Philippine Health Insurance Corp., another government-owned and-controlled corporation, has been accused of distributing Philhealth cards for the President's campaign through a P3.3-billion project for poor Filipinos. The project is funded by the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office.

"After the elections, the economy will go down the drain because there is no more money. We will borrow again, and as already have a debt of about P5 trillion. How will we repay that?" the archbishop asked.

Plunderwatch

Cruz turned over the documents to Plunder-Watch, which will review them and determine what charges to file against Pagcor officials.

Plunder-Watch's Carol Arnaldo said that the group would investigate if "richer people in higher echelons know-and profit from this" Pagcor mismanagements.

FPJ to do an FVR in pursuit of presidential dream

To paragraph 10 ›

Bagong Diwaga, and member of the Prince & FPJ Campaign.

Ramos event sadly put up the Lakas line-up and went on to win the 1992 election. He holds the post of chair emeritus of the ruling Lakas-CMD and is a staunch supporter of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Arnaldo said Ros was in a "better position" than Ramos when the latter launched his candidacy for president.

"Ramos-wise, Ros is No. 1 in the survey, while FVR was almost catching the dust of Miriam Defensor-Santiago. Ros has a big, get-motivated-to-make-campaign-rich-by-the-raging-hand of supporters from the ranks of the middle to upper-middle class," Arnaldo said.

'Let it flow'

Ros himself, when asked in Visayan, Batangas, to comment on the survey results, said he was right: "I would rather take the suggestion of President Estrada."

The standard-bearer of the Koalisyon ng Pagkakaisang Pilipino was referring to the statement of camp of President Joseph Estrada, issued on Wednesday, that if Ros runs Lacson-Sotto should drop his candidacies in Ros's favor.

"Con No. 1 give up for No. 4?" Estrada had said, referring to the respective standings of Ros and Lacson in the surveys.

Ros said there was no need to put a deadline on the unity talks between him and Lacson.

"Just let it flow," he said. "If it's meant to be, then it's meant to be."

Asked whether the stalled talks still had a chance of taking off, he said: "We always hope for unity but as of now, haymen moves na ang aming mga kalaban (our opponents had already moved)."

Ros said other area important was not so much the unity talks as his and his running mate Sen. Loren Legarda's campaign.

He admitted a response to a question that he and Lacson had been exchanging text messages lately. Asked why, he joked that their phone batteries were constantly low.

Told that according to Lacson, a clash of "superpers" was perceived between the talks from the start through, he said: "I don't think so. I've been an actor for almost 30 years. I don't think that came up."

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Edsa opposition rally gains more participants

To paragraph 10 ›

the move was spearheaded not only by political parties but also by a multi-sectoral alliance composed of civil society and public-list groups, the youth sector and women groups, among them, Bayan Muna, Anakbayan, Sanlakasan, Gabriela and Migrante.

Pet said that although he was banking the rally he would not be able to make it as he had a prior engagement. But he noted that his supporters in Bacnotan, Bauang, municipalities in Ilocos Sur and Santa Rosal had led the barangay-by-barangay signature campaign for Macapagal asking the Supreme Court to make her take a leave of absence because of strong suspicions that government resources were being used to fund her campaign.

Lacson, for his part, said he had no apprehension the holding of the rally could lead to something. It would be better to just wait for Election Day," he said reporters yesterday in Agusan del Sur.

Contingency measures

Still, the Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security will convene this morning to discuss contingency measures for the period ahead.

"This is a desperate move by the opposition groups, and we take this as a virtual admission that the President is already a sure winner on May 10," said presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye. "We believe in free speech but they should exercise restraint should this activity push through," he said.

"I see this as a sign that the opposition is really worried and I repeat that they will mobilize a rally because they see that support for the President is getting stronger and stronger," said Malacañang Presidential Assistant for Mindanao Affairs and campaign spokesperson. "This is a sign of weakness of the opposition because the petitions they filed in the Supreme Court and the Commission on Elections have been rejected and dismissed. There is no government funds are being used in the President's campaign.

National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzalez said contingency measures would be in place to ensure peaceful mobility and peace and order.

No alert status

Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita, however, said he saw no need to raise the alert status of both the military and police.

"The National Capital Region Police Office, which is in charge in Metro Manila, knows this is not the first time we are faced with such a situation. Considering the size of hosts of rioters, this happens," he said, adding that the "usual measures" to prevent trouble during big protest actions might be taken.

Ephrem Tan, lawyer Ed Assello, spokesperson of Eliet para sa Bagong Umaga and Pinoy ki PIC campaign to have Democracy Lito Banayo of Partido ng Manggagawa, Lito Lapid, actor-turned-Filipinovoter Bongbong Pilipinas, had agreed in principle to support the plan in a meeting the other day.

Elnes, however, said Villanueva is going "hard" not to receive an official invitation from the rally organizers.

Caution

But Bayan Muna might cancel the rally should it fail to get a cooperative commitment from the other presidential candidates, said Santiago. "So far so we are concerned, there is nothing definite with the group yesterday. Its pending on the responses of major parties and the evolving situation," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon, however, welcomed the four presidential candidates against "going to the streets at this time," saying a huge rally could be open to sabotage by pro-terrorists and destabilizers.

"While we believe in the right to a peaceful assembly, the lead-ers of the planned May 1 rally against the President should think twice. Groups that have planned rallies in the past to pilloried administration efforts would only be so happy to take advantage of a rally of highly-charged partisan followers of various political candidates," he said.

Lieutenant Pangilinan's team of a security "nightmare." Cabeo Tan said this was a remote possibility since Edsa had always been a "peaceful" venue for protest actions.

Administration congressmen Rep. Prospero Nograles (Davao City) said the rally would serve no purpose but to drag down the Philippines in the eyes of local and foreign investors, and foment instability and polarization among the people.

Show evidence

"If they really have (an evidence against the administration, let them do it in the proper venues to support for due process and the rule of law," he said.

Deputy presidential spokesperson Ricardo Saludo said bigger protest actions could be expected on May 1 this year because of the presidential elections.

But he doubted if a huge crowd would turn up for the anti-government forces.

The "great majority of the members of the Labor movement" would be celebrating Labor Day with the President, he said. With reports from Inquirer Research Bureau and Cynthia D. Balana

17 RP sites environment hot spots

To paragraph 8 ›

2. Tuol Lake in Batangas is dying, but like Laguna Lake, both are heavily polluted with chemical, human waste and garbage.

3. Mosquito lake in Batangas is so polluted that aquatic life is almost nonexistent.

4. Mt. Isarog in Camarines Sur was declared a national park and yet its denudation continues.

5. Lake Buhi in both Camarines Sur and Albay is in an extremely critical state of deterioration.

6. The San Vicente-Tuyuy-Bataan forest in Bulacan is no longer a forest.

7. The Northwestern Peninsula of Panay is silted and eroding.

8. The Central Panay mountains of Madjaas-Baloy complex.

9. The Pantabangan-Nueva ecosystem.

10. The Dampol River in Lanao del Norte.

11. Mt. Apo in North Cotabato, Davao del Sur and Davao City.

12. Mt. Banahaw in Quezon, Batangas and South Cotabato.

13. Mt. Bilatukan in Bukidnon.

14. Mt. Matutum in North Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Sarangani, South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat.

15. Lake Dumanquilas in Misamis Occidental.

16. The Mt. Malindang in Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur.

17. Basilan in Zamboanga.

All the endangered forests, mountains and bodies of water are victims of man's desire for money.

Logging, mining

Without question, logging and mining are the most damaging practices. As late as 1945, Philippine forests and watersheds were pristine and abundant with nature's bounty. However, after World War II when the Philippines was given the so-called war damage reparations by Japan in 1956, the degradation began.

Instead of the promised cash, second-hand mining and logging equipment formed into the country from second-hand fishing boats and so on).

Thus, the Philippine environment suffered. It is still suffering.

There are three hot spots everyone should know:

1. The pulled processing plant in Bataan, which is expected to further pollute the watershed.

2. The PMC Colleoni Corp., cement processing plant in Cebu, which has been polluting the Strait of Mactan since 20 years ago.

3. The quarry activities in Bacnotan and San Mateo towns in Rizal which have reduced the mountains in that land, almost, that is. Just watch when the next giant typhoon comes in Rizal.

But there is a glimmer of hope. There is light at the end of the long, gloomy tunnel of dusty action. That hope and salvation are the Filipinos.

Now is your chance to make a difference. Let us all embark on a massive education campaign. It would be a lifetime work.

The Davao Commission on Environment and Natural Resources and Department of Environment and Natural Resources will lead the education campaign, starting with the provinces where the critical areas are located.

We already contacted the DAI Club in Davao, which will plant trees on the declared mountains as soon as the rains come.

We shall go around the country on a tree-planting spree.

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

BUSINESS

Editor Raul G. Marcelo
Assistant Editor Cecile S. Mariano

IMF upgrades growth outlook for RP

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund has upgraded its 2004 economic growth outlook for the Philippines from 4 percent to 4.5 percent, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). It is, however, expecting the country to remain the laggard among Asia's emerging economies over the next two years.

Despite the upgrading, the revised 4.5 percent growth forecast of the IMF for the Philippines remained the slowest in the region.

The IMF has projected a much higher growth of 7 percent for Thailand and 5.7 percent for Malaysia for this year. Even Indonesia was projected to post a better growth rate of 4.8 percent.

The four Asian economies mentioned are projected to grow by 5.4 percent, better than the 5 percent growth registered last year.

"In the Philippines, vulnerabilities remain, so it is important—especially during the run-up to the presidential elections in May—to stay on the fiscal course and stand ready to tighten monetary policy should exchange rate depreciation pose a threat to the attainment of the inflation target," the fund said in its latest world economic outlook released yesterday.

"The priorities are to set forcefully and without delay to increase tax revenue, restructure the power sector, strengthen the banking system and improve the business environment," it explained.

The increase in the GDP growth projection for the Philippines was in line with the IMF's expectation of a strong rebound by emerging Asia, after grappling with the outbreak of bird flu virus (SARS).

GDP refers to the total amount of goods and services produced by an economy and is considered the single most important indicator of economic performance.

The IMF said "emerging Asia"—which the fund defined to include China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines—had grown rapidly over the past three decades and was in [illegible] forces have not let global economy.

The downside to Asia's regional trade, the fund said, suggested that the region was, as a whole, becoming less dependent on the rest of the world and more of an autonomous engine of growth.

China was particularly cited as an important consumer of final goods, contributing to growth in the rest of the world especially Japan.

The IMF said it was expecting emerging Asia to grow by 7.2 percent this year, sustaining the same level of growth posted last year.

"With the recovery following the Asian financial crisis, emerging Asia's imports from the rest of the world now account for almost 2.5 percent of GDP of the rest of

Gov't to push for increases in petroleum taxes

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ASIATRUST Bank

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE INTER-AGENCY Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) will lobby for increases in the excise taxes imposed on petroleum products, saying that the rates applied on them are already outdated.

In its recent meeting, members of the DBCC agreed to include this measure in its legislative agenda, it source in the government said the DBCC would consult with the Department of Energy for the proposal. It is planning to submit the proposal to the new Congress.

"The move is not for anything else but for practical reasons. The value of P1 is now much lower than what it was in 1996 when the tax rate was set," said the government official.

The official said the problem with the current excise tax rates applied on petroleum products, accounted under the fuel code, is that they are specific.

For instance, leaded premium gasoline is charged a tax of P5.35 per liter; unleaded premium gasoline, P4.20; kerosene, 60 centavos; and Diesel, P1.61.

The official said these rates were already inappropriate because of inflation. This is the reason the DBCC will also ask Congress to pass a bill that will automatically increase excise tax rates on a regular basis, the source said.

"There should be a law allowing the automatic adjustments in excise tax rates to reflect inflation. Since Congress usually takes months time in passing a bill, automatically increasing the rates will be helpful," the source said.

Aside from petroleum products, the BBCC will also push for the inclusion of other products in the automatic adjustment of their specific tax rates. Products that are subject to excise taxes, such as cigarettes and alcohol, are imposed specific tax rates.

The government official said the DBCC has yet to come up with the estimated additional revenues that could be generated with the planned measure.

While the move to increase the excise tax imposed on petroleum products can be a big boost to the government's revenue collection efforts, it is also expected to generate strong objections from affected sectors, like transport. Transport groups recently lobbied strongly for a fare hike following increases in the cost of oil products.

RP aims to become world leader in renewable energy

THE PHILIPPINES aims to become the world leader in geothermal energy as it accelerates its bid to expand its renewable energy resources, said National Transmission Corp. (Transco) president and CEO Alan Ortiz.

Ortiz said the expansion of the renewable energy resources would help promote the country's environment while generating substantial foreign exchange savings since the country only spends on indigenous resources.

He made the statement on behalf of Energy Secretary Vincent Perez Jr. at a meeting with business leaders from Baguio City in Benguet.

In the same forum, Ortiz also announced the forthcoming completion of the P600-million San Roque Hydro-Associated Transmission Line project. The Binyamana-funded 261-circuit kilometer dedicated transmission facility will connect the 81.35-km San Roque power plant in San Manuel, Pangasinan to the Luzon power grid.

He also unveiled Transco's P900.42-million Mindanao Associated Kings San Manuel transmission line upgrading project and the P2.9-billion Asian Development Bank-sponsored Luzon transmission line upgrading project.

ORTIZ

Both are slated for completion within the next two years.

Ortiz said Pangasinan and the rest of Luzon possess substantial indigenous resources that could be tapped for the island's growing requirements.

BCDA seeks P3-B reduction in cost of highway project

By Russel W. Dumlao

THE BASES Conversion Development Authority is asking the winning bidder of the Clark-Subic Highway contract to bring down the cost of the project.

BCDA president Rufo Colayco said that the winning consortium—composed of Hanjin Corp., Isuzu Corp. and Wonil Steel Corp.—had offered the lowest bid of P11 billion for the 64-kilometer highway.

The group bested two others: BPD consisted of Manila Corp., Toyo Construction Co. Ltd. and Kobelco Construction Philippines, Ltd. Co.; and BLDV made up of Kajima Corp., Chiyoda Corp., JFE Engineering Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. Co.) bidding conducted late last year.

The highway forms part of a project that will be financed by a P19.5-billion concessional loan from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation. It will link the Clark special economic zone in Angeles, Pampanga to industrial hub Backwoods Cubao in Quezon.

The Clark-Subic highway is one of two packages comprising the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project (SCTEP) that is meant to make easier the expansion of businesses and logistics facilities in Central Luzon.

Colayco said the contractor to agree on an P8-billion price tag for the Clark-Subic package," Colayco said. "In fact, the Japanese group has agreed to slash P1.2 billion from their original bid of P11 billion."

The official explained that the talks to pare down the cost were also being done under rules set by JBIC.

The other component of the SCTEP is the SLEX-Subic-Clark highway, which would link Subic's seaport facilities to Clark's airport facilities. The new road is expected to cut travel time between the two points from as long as two hours to just 30 minutes.

GSMI eyes regional expansion

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

GSM maker Ginebra San Miguel Inc. (GSMI) said it would expand into Vietnam, Thailand and other countries in the Asean.

GSMI chair Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. said the company was now laying down the plans for this expansion effort.

The firm expected an 18% percent growth in exports last year, boosting revenue by 6 percent to P12.1 billion.

The company is also set to further improve its relationship with customers to bridge the gaps in the distribution system.

"We want to be more responsive that deepen the growth of the San Miguel industry and continues to increase our value in a way that moves the expectations of the market and our investors," Cojuangco said.

"To do this we should be 'time proactive.' We will always foster values and improve dealers, to profit faster."

Cojuangco said GSMI had continued "every part of our operations and embarked on a program to regain our momentum, further strengthening the foundations on which GSMI was founded on to grow and prosper."

That it will do by pushing its dealers in an intense penetration of hard liquor outlets and enhance their multi-product portfolio. GSMI has been focusing on improving both the appeal and value of its products, specifically in flagship brand, Ginebra San Miguel.

It observed steady growth in 2003 that and potential growth in other complementary brands or sub brands, such as Gran Matador brandy.

The company was recently cited as the world's No. 1 gin brand with sales in 27 million cases a year of five times that of the second ranking brand.

In a December 2003 report of US-based alcoholic beverage analysts firm Impact Databank, GSMI topped a list of 30 global brands, selling some 27.4 million cases in 2003. Import Databank is a major source for data on the world alcoholic beverage industry. Its reports are used by several international publications, including the Wall Street Journal and New York Times.

Charles San Miguel, the flagship brand of GSMI, outsold Diageo's Jonnie's, which rolled out about 5.1 million cases in 2003, and Tanqueray, at 2 million cases. Behind in fourth is Bacardi's rum, with 1.2 million cases, and Allied Domecq Spirits & Wines' Seagram, with 1.1 million cases.

The country's gin consumption level was higher than the United States' 11.59 million cases. Spain's 3.09 million cases, the United Kingdom's 2.9 million cases and India's 1.68 million cases. GSMI topped earlier an 800-percent increase in exports in 2003, with 867,000 cases of liquor exported in 2003 from 95,000 cases in 2002.

The company also posted a 6-percent growth in net sales revenues and consolidated sales volume in 2003.

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SM CENTER HOTLINES

DoH urged to check complaints vs HMO

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission (SEC) has asked the Department of Health to address complaints involving medical service providers Cardiac Health Shield Inc. (CHSI).

In a letter to Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit, SEC chair Lilia Bautista asked that the DOH check CHSI's track record and see whether it can deliver on its promises if benefits and services are to be publicly.

The SEC based the letter following complaints raised by the Philippine Federation of Pre-Need Plan Companies Inc. (FPPCI).

FPPCI claimed that CHSI has integrated pre-need pension plan features in its health maintenance organization or (HMO) plan and that the company was soliciting investments from the public without a license.

The pre-need association also claimed that CHSI has not set up a trust fund to guarantee the delivery of benefits and services to the public and that its paid-up capital is P17 million, far below the P60 million required of pre-need companies.

Last June, the SEC wrote CHSI and brought these concerns to its attention.

CHSI told the SEC that being an HMO, it was outside the administrative jurisdiction of the SEC and that all of its health care programs have been submitted to and passed by the DoH.

The SEC said the case of CHSI was not unique since insurance companies and banking institutions have introduced new features to their traditional products that are somewhat similar to pre-need products.

"These innovative products are approved and subject to the appropriate regulatory measures imposed by their respective regulatory agencies to address the risks attendant to the new features. We understand the same safeguards were put in place when the DoH approved and allowed the CHSI HMO plan to be sold," SEC wrote.

Unilab vs the big boys

COCKTALES

Victor C. Aguilon

UNILAB has served notice to the multinational competitors dominating the Philippine drug industry...it is filing right-to-use patent applications impounding on their most profitable pharmaceutical products whose exclusivities have expired or about to.

More than that, Unilab, the largest Philippine drug company that has ever become a regional player, will gladly wage war to court and in media to defend its right to manufacture similar but cheaper drugs.

United Laboratories president Cielito Ejercito ventured before an employees' conference Wednesday the "nuisance patent" suits reportedly by the foreign giants to prevent Third World competition from manufacturing generic versions.

"We cannot ignore the malice behind the efforts of big pharma MNCs to extend their product patents extensions ... in order to block competition," said Ejercito, alluding to the patent case filed by AstraZeneca against Unilab only last week before the Pasiglan Regional Trial Court.

(See Cocktales last Monday for additional background.)

The patent infringement case had been timed to prevent Unilab from launching its branded but half-priced version of the anti-hypertensive drug Inhelipin.

The Philippine unit is similar to the 71 lawsuits initiated by AstraZeneca, Europe's second largest drug manufacturer, to block other companies from manufacturing their own version of Prilosec, the heartburn drug whose worldwide sales brought $5.7 billion to AstraZeneca in 2000 alone.

Because of its increasing head-to-head competition with the MNCs, Unilab last year decided to withdraw from the foreign-dominated Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association of the Philippines.

Polo and the Philippines

GOVERNING the exclusive Manila Polo Club is like governing the Philippines.

Club members are constantly complaining about the poor service and the quality of the food, but any proposal to increase the club dues gets booed down. In the Philippines, everyone is considering about fair trade and criminalizing all anti-action, but everybody tries to dodge taxes whenever they can.

After receiving poor proxy feedback, the Manila Polo board decided that the rescheduled special shareholders' meeting yesterday be postponed to May 5.

The meeting is being called to amend the club's bylaws, so that the board would no longer have to round up directors and decisions ... only the board and nominees for vice-president will suffer under the proposed amendments—every time the club's finances is in jeopardy.

The monthly membership dues at the club, incidentally, is P1,200, about the price of a good meal in a Makati hotel.

The proposed increase amounts to P375/month.

Judicial spanking

A FORMER president of the Baguio chapter of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines, Abdulja Estrada, has been publicly berated among the "legal mercenaries" and "servants" by Executive Judge Clifton Garay of the Regional Trial Court of Agoo, La Union.

"Lawyers have that notion that they are more equal than others in the community," Garay said in scorning defiance paralyzing Estrada's duty to theft. "That when they are treated servants of their clients, which of course is the real thing, they invoke."

"Lawyers seem to be idolized," the judge continued. "They want to be handled ... Even if they are paid as legal mercenaries, they act as if the fees are incidental to their being hired because they are the divine' champions."

Notwithstanding his formula, the judge stopped short of quoting Shakespeare's famous line from Henry VI.

Heard through the grapevine

A BAGUIO RTC judge, known for his strictness and apparent straightness, has unfortunately been suspended for a year for gross ignorance of the law.

The Supreme Court has chosen not to publicly reveal the decision.

The judge was a former clerk at the Court of Appeals.

(Email: cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com or cocktales_pdi@hotmail.com.)

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BUSINESS

BIR backs proposal to slap taxes on OFWs

By Michelle V. Rosca

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue has backed a proposal to collect taxes from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), a perennially lucrative source of income-tax revenue as their number has grown over the years.

The BIR, which is hard-pressed to improve tax collections, said income-tax collection from Filipinos working abroad has dropped due to a tax exemption granted some years ago.

OFWs used to pay a one- to 2-percent income tax until the Tax Code was revised in 1997.

BIR Deputy Commissioner Jose Antonio said the tax exemption of OFWs contributed to the drop in the revenue agency's collection of income tax from individual taxpayers.

He said the fact that the number of OFWs has increased over the years doubly hurt the BIR's revenue collection efforts.

"Before, the number of OFWs was insignificant. But today, their number has grown and they have already become a major industry. Taxing them would be a big help," said Antonio.

The idea to re-impose taxes on OFWs was proposed by the government's National Tax Research Center (NTRC).

The research agency earlier said that highly paid Filipino workers abroad, such as engineers and ship captains, should give their share to the Philippine government.

It said, however, that lower income earners like domestic helpers could have their tax exemption retained.

NTRC Deputy Director Dante B. de los Santos earlier, in saying that exempting all OFWs from income tax was unjust because some OFWs can afford to pay taxes and help the government in its revenue generation efforts.

Hans Sy takes over SM Prime

By Elizabeth G. Sanchez

HANS SY has replaced his father, Henry Sy Jr., as president of Old Orient Holdings Inc., the holding company of the highly profitable SM retail group.

The elder Sy, who founded the country's biggest mall chain, will remain as chairman of the company and has expressed his intention to focus more on policy making.

Hans Sy is the 4th of Sy's 10 children and was senior vice president for operations before he was named president yesterday after SM Prime's stockholders meeting.

The incoming president said the group remained "quite bullish" on the prospects of the property market in Southeast Asia and China.

"It's a very new market over there. Anything can happen. We really need time to study [the international property market]. It's a very different market in Southeast Asia," Sy said.

He also said that SM Prime was still studying the possibility of bidding in the privatized coastal supermalls that operate in Xiamen, China into the listed company.

The Sy group has a majority stake in the joint venture company that runs two SM City malls in Xiamen.

Sy is expected to carve the company's aggressive expansion plans this year.

SM Prime told stockbrokers yesterday that it plans to spend P1 billion this year, largely on the opening of new malls in Bacolod City, Cavite next month and in Batangas City by the last quarter of the year.

The company is also set to open its 300,000-square-meter Mall of Asia by next year, which officials said was 15 percent complete.

The Mall of Asia is touted to be the group's biggest project located on a reclaimed area in Roxas Boulevard.

SM Prime is also set to open the 174,000-square-meter SM City in San Lazaro Manila, a 50,000-square-meter SM City in Molino, Cavite and SM City in Mandaluyong.

DISCLOSURES

ABS-CBN Holdings Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on June 28 at 2 p.m.

* * *

ELECTED directors of **A. Soriano Corp.** were Andres Soriano III, Eduardo Soriano, Raymundo Po, John Gokongwei Jr., Enrique Razon Jr., Roberto Romulo, Oscar Hilado, Warren Chi Manning and Jose Duavit. Also, the company declared a cash dividend of P0.05 per share in favor of stockholders of record as of May 4 and payable on May 28.

* * *

ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 26, 9 a.m. at the ABS-CBN Studio No. 1 of ABS-CBN Broadcast Center Complex, Quezon City. Only stockholders of record as of March 15 are entitled to vote at the meeting.

* * *

ELECTED directors of **PDI Leasing and Finance Inc.** were Antonio Go, Rene Bengzon-Ong, Manolo Arguelles, Gerard Lee Go, Anthony Cuneng, Roberto Ocfemia, Evangeline Go Ng Pay, Edgardo Cardenas Jr., Jonathan Go, Kenneth Ocfemia and Walter Wenceslao. Independent directors are to be elected Martin Bonnaillie, Roberto Romulo, Juan Santos and Andres Soriano III. **Compiled by Marissa D. Sibayo, PDI Research**

Currencies

April 22, 2004 Country	Unit	Cash Equivalent	Buying Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.018000	1.000000	55.7000
Japan	Yen	0.000172	0.009537	0.5300
United Kingdom	Pound	0.032811	1.814000	101.0000
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.002302	0.127800	7.1200
Switzerland	Franc	0.014500	0.797100	44.4000
Canada	Dollar	0.013731	0.760100	42.3500
Singapore	Dollar	0.010873	0.599700	33.4200
Australia	Dollar	0.013100	0.723500	40.3000
Bahrain	Dinar	0.048000	2.653000	147.7000
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.004779	0.264000	14.7000
Kuwait	Dollar	0.058800	3.248000	180.9000
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.004698	0.259700	14.4600
Thailand	Baht	0.000452	0.024900	1.3870
UAE	Dirham	0.004898	0.270700	15.0800
Euro	Euro	0.022000	1.216000	67.7200
Argentina	Peso	0.006000	0.334000	18.6000
Brazil	Real	0.006000	0.331700	18.4700
Bahrain	Dollar	0.010000	0.552600	30.7700
India	Rupee	0.000400	0.022100	1.2300
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000002	0.000096	0.0053
New Zealand	Dollar	0.012000	0.663000	36.9300
Norway	Krone	0.002600	0.143700	8.0000
South Africa	Rand	0.002700	0.149200	8.3100
Korea	Won	0.000015	0.000829	0.0462
Sweden	Krona	0.002400	0.132600	7.3800
Taiwan	N Dollar	0.000500	0.027600	1.5400

IMF upgrades . . .

Forecasting for

the world, compared with 4 percent for the European Union and 3.5 percent for the United States," the report said.

While China's increasing consumption and its dual role as a production hub and emerging consumer of final goods, its imports were increasingly capital-driven and fueling production.

The IMF has projected an 8.5 percent growth for China this year, the only country in emerging Asia that was expected to outperform the 7.2 percent average forecast growth for the region.

The newly industrialized Asian economies—Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—are likely to grow by an average of 5.2 percent, with Hong Kong and Korea posting the best growths of 5.4 percent.

RP stocks close at 3-month high

STOCKS rose to a new three-month high yesterday fueled by interest in Aboitiz PLDT and energy investment firm First Philippine Holdings Corp. as players continued to feel on a victory by President Macapagal-Arroyo in the May 10 elections.

Analysts view Arroyo, a trained economist, as more market-friendly than the main opposition candidate and think her victory would mean continuity in economic policies.

"I think it's really the realization that Arroyo is going to win after six of last week's exit polls showed that the two opposition rivals have failed to gain. This is boosting market sentiment," said Asiapolitics president Jose Rivera.

Arroyo's closest rival is movie actor Fernando Poe Jr.

Efforts to unite the opposition have fractured as the chairman of the anti-fellow opposition congressman Aquilino Pimentel Jr. has asked Senate President Franklin Drilon to step aside in favor of the other.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT), the country's largest phone firm, rose 1.42 percent or P1.05 to P1,501.

First Philippine Holdings Corp., power firm of Philippines' billionaire electricity Dan Henry Mendoza, jumped 4.03 percent or P3 to P78.

"Investors are positioning ahead as those values were last week's earlier ... primarily investments such as First Philippine Holdings, Meralco and Aboitiz," said AB Capital economic analyst Ivan Vacalares.

The main index gained 30.63 points or 4.68 percent to 1,708.28 points, its highest since Jan. 28. The market is up 7.34 percent so far this year.

Gainers beat losers 28 to 21 as value turnover rose to P573.02 million from P529.91 million. Reuters

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1M - 4,999,999	5.50	5.75	5.75	6.00	7.00
5M - 9,999,999	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50
10,000,000 - 49,999,999	7.75	7.75	7.75	7.75	8.00
50 million and up	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00

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DAR plans to draw P15B from Marcos wealth

Cordon sanitaire and government failure

By Ernesto M. Ordoñez

DURING the ongoing National Sugar Crisis Congress, Alfredo Alangdeo, chair of the Sarangani Vegetable Growers and Exporters Cooperative, expressed his dismay over the government's failure to respond to his request for an investigation of the irregular importation of rice even before the first shipment arrived in the second half of 2003.

Tax-free rice importation was severely affected by the importation. By nine months, their wholesale price price went down to P15/P1.4 kilo from P35/P3.

Alangdeo said he would file before the Office of the Ombudsman a case against the secretary of the Department of Agriculture for not complying with the legally mandated 15-day limit to respond to his letter.

At the expense of farmers

Alangdeo believes there is no response to his letter because some DA people are promoting a politically motivated official who may have monetary or family ties with the importers. He said he is prepared to file charges against the official.

Alangdeo is angry because this is not the first time the DA did not reply to his request for advice. On April 23 last year, he submitted such a request, but there was no response.

After six months of irregular rice importation, which a DA official legalized even without the required Tariff Risk Analysis, Alangdeo joined other farmers leaders in sending frequent Text Raid Multitext for help.

Multitext also wrote a letter to the author (rice seeking an investigation).

Alangdeo said that there was again no reply to Multitext letter, which was prompted as reported in the DA Office of the Secretary on Jan. 6, 2004.

In Text Raid, Alangdeo held a press conference where he distributed documents identifying the erring government officials responsible for importing 1,275 tons of rice from October to December 2003. Citing the magnitude of the damage done, Alangdeo said the importation constitutes economic sabotage.

Still, there was no DA response.

Finally, Alangdeo on Feb. 19 faxed certified "ok court" letter to the Office of the DA Secretary and had the copy stamped as officially received.

In that letter, he cited the mandated 15 working day limit for a response. It has been 19 working days since then.

Alangdeo also submitted the letter, and the working days since Alangdeo faxed the letter, but there has been no response. Alangdeo wrote justice for the 80,000 cavan farmers who suffered greatly.

He believes going to the Ombudsman will finally produce results.

We have also learned that a top DA official had said that he had not seen the letters and therefore could not respond.

Cordon sanitaire

He informed Alangdeo that the importance before might have been caused by a cordon sanitaire that prevented the official from acting on the request. Alangdeo has agreed to put aside his plans, however, he says that if there is still no response by April 30, he will proceed with his Ombudsman plan.

In the case of the Presidential Agricultural Agenda submitted by the Alyansa Agribuhayan to the presidential candidates, a cordon sanitaire may also be causing performance failures.

The agenda was developed through nationwide consultations for over a year. It has both overall and sectoral recommendations, but six are identified as of highest priority.

Presidential candidates

Presidential candidates Jesse Robredo, Perfecto Yasay and Eddie Villanueva apparently had no cordon sanitaires that prevented them from responding to this agenda and personally meeting with the Alyansa leaders. All three agreed with the agenda with minor modifications.

They also agreed with the six high priority issues, except for Senator Lacson who expressed reservations about the restoration of 3M3 17 valuds directly-projected waters for small fishers priority.

Fernando Poe Jr. apparently has a cordon sanitaire. He informed this personally that none farmer leaders left for was precisely there pre-poor. Poe has been known for refusing to deal with business leaders, but delayed meeting the biggest coalition of farmers and fishers folk with 20 national and local federations and organizations. Poe said he did not know of Alyansa's letter and is sending it to his staff. He said he attended the meeting and would schedule it as soon as possible. It is hoped that no one would block his response to a follow-up letter or call.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has likewise not responded to a similar Alyansa letter. The Alyansa is also awaiting for a response from her office.

It is important that there be no cordon sanitaires in this important area. The Alyansa has announced that it will inform the public of the presidential candidates' stands on agriculture issues on May 3. For example, if a candidate has no response on the agenda items addressing 900,000 low-yield lands solely for the benefit of the 2.7 million small coconut farmers, these farmers would be advised not to vote for this candidate. A possible spin is that this candidate does not wish to respond because he may offend financial backers who want a large portion of the 900,000 low-yield lands for themselves. The problem then will not be a cordon sanitaire but the presidential candidate himself or herself.

Good faith

As in the case of Alangdeo and the 80 list of the DA Secretary we should not be too quick to accuse the subject of lack of sympathy or "cordon sanitaire." Perhaps the official does not even know of the matter because of a cordon sanitaire. He should rather assume good faith and persuade the cordon sanitaire to see to it that work more effectively and fully support the government's efforts. The official must not even eliminate any cordon sanitaire that is causing government failures that may be unfairly attributed to him or her. Corrective action must be immediately taken so that government failures will not hide the successes our people merit excellently today.

(The author is chair of Agrinewsnet, a private sector initiative, former undersecretary of agriculture and trade and industry, and former chair and cabinet secretary for Presidential Flagship Programs and Projects. For inquiries or suggestions, e-mail agrinewsnet@philonline.com.ph or fax 02.435.8433.)

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE DISBURSEMENT of agrarian reform may soon close on the P50 billion (Bureau wealth), which the government has recently recovered.

According to Agrarian Reform Secretary Jun Mc. Pozor, the P50 billion has been transferred to the accounts of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the Land Bank of the Philippines.

"We were informed by the Bureau of Treasury that we could now tap it for treasury and use it for budgetary purposes," Pozor pointed out in an interview.

The DAR intends to get an initial P15 billion from the so-called Marcos ill-gotten wealth.

The money has been released to the DAR following the Supreme Court's recent issuance of a writ of execution effectively releasing the money to the national government. Of the P50 billion, P30 billion has been earmarked for the DAR. The remaining P20 billion will be used to compensate human rights victims during martial law.

Pozor said the bulk of the P15 billion would be used to acquire lands and pay for any landowners whose property had been distributed to farmers under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

He said 75 percent of DAR budget for this year would be used for CARP while the rest would be used to deliver basic support services to agrarian reform communities nationwide.

The agency is also set to receive P9 billion in official development assistance (ODA) funds from foreign donors to build more farm-to-market roads and provide support services for agrarian reform communities nationwide.

Pozor said that the governments of Italy, France and Britain as well as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the Asian Development Bank are willing to co-finance the reconstruction of rural networks and provide training assistance to generate rural employment this year.

ODA loans from foreign donors have not requested terms. The proposals, however, are still undergoing evaluation by the interagency Investment Coordination Committee.

DA to fund post harvest facilities in N. Luzon

THE DEPARTMENT of Agriculture is all set to risk in P25 million loan for the construction of post-harvest facilities for Northern Luzon farmers.

According to Agriculture Secretary Luis P. Lorenzo, the amount would be tapped from the Agriculture Competitiveness Enhancement Fund of the DA.

Part of the P25 million would also be used to buy cold storage facilities and vans, to lengthen the shelf life of vegetables coming from Northern Luzon, Lorenzo said.

Hard vegetable farmers have been complaining to the Department of Agriculture that their produce comprised of cabbages and carrots could not be transported to other cities due to lack of logistical facilities.

"In turn, we will use vegetables to middlemen often at a loss or very low prices because we would not want them to rot," Benguet Gov. Raul Molintas said in a separate interview.

Molintas noted that the vegetable farmers also have to contend with the influx of cheap vegetables from China.

In 2002 alone, the country imported about 16.4 million (P528.7 million) worth of fresh/chilled vegetables as compared to 15.8 million (P290 million) the previous year, according to the National Statistics Office.

The figure excludes those that have entered the country through illegal means (smuggling).

Molintas, who has led efforts in 2002 to raise the anti-dumping period vegetables, said that despite the GATT deadline, both the United States and Japan continued to subsidize their agriculture sectors by spending millions for farm inputs, feeds and equipment.

The government recently pegged vegetable tariff imports to maximum of 25 percent and a minimum of 40 percent.

"But much remains to be done to make the local vegetable industry competitive," Molintas said. The supply chain must be addressed. For instance, there is a need to enhance production technologies to farmers to ensure sufficient supply and improve quality." (Bernice A. Dayrit.ca

ERC hands down guidelines for power distributors

By Abigail L. Ho

THE ENERGY Regulatory Commission on Wednesday issued the guidelines on how distribution utilities will recover the generation components of their costs through their retail rates.

The guidelines provide clear rules on the "full recovery of prudent and reasonable economic costs related to the generation component" that power distribution companies will pay for their customers.

Also, the guidelines will serve as a basis for the ERC's approval of future generation contracts.

The new order paves the way for the formalization of supply agreements for existing contracts that National Power Corp. has with distribution utilities, which will include the quantity and capacity of energy being contracted as well as the regional rate schedule.

For distributors with no existing power supply contracts with Napocor, they can forge transmission supply contracts (TSCs) with the state firm.

These TSCs are seen to help Napocor dispose of the generation assets that it has lined up for privatization as these customers will assure potential investors of a ready market for the electricity that they will market upon takeover of the state firm's power plants.

However, Napocor and National Transmission Corp. (Transco) will first have to file with the ERC a regional TSC availability report containing actual generation and transmission capacities per region.

Napocor's regional generation capacity should take into consideration energy taken up by existing customers and supplemental agreements that Napocor has taken up under pending TSCs, and that which is still available to distributors under their TSCs.

Limitations on generation, like those related to fuel supply, should also be taken into account.

Transmission constraints should include the maximum power transfer capability of Napocor plants to each potential supplier per region, taking into consideration the applicable system reliability and security parameters.

The recovery of generation costs within a distribution license retail rates will then be pegged on the regional TSC rate that the Napocor charges.

In determining the aggregate limitation on recovery of costs of the generation component in the retail rates, the applicable regional TSC shall be for the rate period as the generation capacity and quantity under supply arrangement for which the distribution utility is seeking recovery of costs in the retail rate," the guidelines stated.

Power distributors cannot recover any generation component in excess of the regional TSC rate, unless approved by the ERC.

Also, recovery of costs will be limited to the amount of electricity available under the regional TSC availability report.

Costs incurred for electricity in excess of that in the regional TSC availability report cannot be recovered unless approved by the ERC, using a cost determination methodology that takes into account relevant technical, environmental, economic and financial criteria.

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Transco wants to put up transmission line in Panay

AS PART of the effort to avert a power crisis in the Visayas, the National Transmission Corp. (Transco) has submitted a proposal to create a new transmission line in Panay.

Once approved the P1.3-billion Panay Backbone Transmission Project, a 138-kilovolt transmission line, will be constructed from Pototan in Iloilo, extending Transco's power delivery services toward the northern and southern part of Panay.

The project is supposed to be completed in 2007. It is expected to complement the Panay-Boracay interconnection project under Transco's Small Island Submarine Interconnection Investment (SIIIC) Program.

Transco president and chief executive Alan Ortiz said in a recent interview that they would present the project before the technical board of the National Economic and Development Authority's Investment Coordination Committee on May 5.

Should the project get the nod of the Neda-ICC technical board, Ortiz said it would then be submitted to the Cabinet-level Neda-ICC for final approval.

Ortiz explained that consolidating the Panay backbone was one of the main steps the state firm would take as part of its effort to prevent a power shortfall in the region.

Right now, some areas in the Visayas are already experiencing rotating brownouts due to lack of adequate capacity and transmission problems.

Transco has lined up a number of projects under its Visayan Transmission Development Program, or Project VISTA, to ensure that delivery of electricity from power-rich areas to power-hungry ones would be more efficient and reliable.

Some of these projects are the P6.6-billion Cebu-Negros-Panay (CNP), the P2.7-billion Leyte-Cebu, and the P5-billion Cebu-Mactan transmission projects.

Ortiz said bidding for the CNP project would be opened by next week of June before bidding for the Mactan project.

Ortiz also said that Transco has entered a joint venture (JV) agreement with Philippine Grid Corp., a consortium composed of Hopewell Holdings Ltd., Meralco Industrial Engineering Services Corp. and Monte Oro Grid Resources Corp., to construct the Leyte-Luzon project.

Under the JV agreement, Transco will own 60 percent of the project, while the consortium will own the remaining 40 percent.

Ortiz said the project will cost around $200 million.

Ortiz said Transco is also looking at the possibility of constructing a transmission line in Mindanao.

Catching the spa fever /C2

LIFESTYLE

Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

The incredible Jelly Kelly

LIFE-STYLED

The Diva Season Soo Jakoo

NOt to be gauche but you don't see anyone walk a Jelly Kelly bag in the office, mall, cross, anywhere. The woman's addiction to the Jelly Kelly has been resumed for quite some time and, it seems, is not going away any time soon.

The Jelly Kelly (over women located actors—from Europe to the US to Asia. The Financial Times and Asian Wall Street Journal have reported on this craze. The bag is so ubiquitous that it's like the "wear black" (the universal color) or the "non Livia" (where the brand was a universal garment, cashed smashing not anymore).

It's been called the "poor girl's Birkin," referring to the luxury brand whose Kelly and Birkin bags have spawned such love of bagsis, even if they cost an arm and a leg. It's beyond the reach of the working class like us, but still it's interesting to know how luxuries and trends work, especially if they're around you.

Jelly Kelly is a line of bags characterized by their soft opaque rubber, sleek eye-candy yummy colors, the bag look with the Jelly Kelly logo on it and also a hang tag. The line has so many kinds but the ones that really sold like hotcakes are the design coke-offs from the Birkin. (Call them knock-offs.)

Beauty editor **Mel Cuevas** wrote the backpassed in April Metro: "Though Hermes first came out with the Birkin bag in Amsterdam rubber a few years ago, credit goes to designer and businessman Steve Madden. The pioneer of smart clothes in the US, Brahman incorporated the rubber bags while on vacation in Milan, named the bags Jelly Kelly and brought them to high-end stores in New York. Although Stedman insisted that his new bags were not intended as literal replicas of the iconic bag but as an accessories," the 19th year-old leather house was certainly not amused. Hermes filed a lawsuit in the UK six last year for unspecified damages. Stedman has since stopped selling the bags."

But how do you stop the rage? By then the bags were selling like hotcakes on the local streets. This post in Mel to Manila, the Jelly Kelly...from the genuine to the knock-offs (okay, knock-offs of knock-offs)—is sold everywhere, from the high-end boutiques in malls and tiangge, via wide price range.

That's what's curious about this fad. It cuts across markets...from rich to middle-class, from A to AB, from celeb to corporate wifey. I saw Bida Aquino of ABS-CBN 9003, with her Jelly Kelly with animal print. Globe's **Anna** blogger/scene exactly where to get hers for a good price. **Cecille Narciso** has a roomy white one. **Rosina Uwa** has a purple version.

Indeed this year, I'd say the Jelly Kelly is the class equalizer. It's a common denominator of women from varied demographics.

And we, even if it's that ubiquitous, it has lost its big factor. It's not that badge yet.

Why? Can't tell for sure. It should make an interesting market study but the obvious thing is, its color and texture (rubber good enough to chose) are so appealing, so design is practical. Its color makes it stylishlike—hot pink, aqua, purple, white, gray, opal black.

Etc, there are black Jelly Kelly.

The Jelly Kelly also has varied lines, although they're not sold in Silver Shanda yet. There are Jelly Kelly backpacks, doctor bags, saddle bags, messenger bags, tennis bags, even diaper bags, even purses and checkbook covers. And check them out online.

I must admit, however, that I don't have one and don't intend to have one. Some women much their years with, ah, the guys they've been with. I look at my stuff and realize that I can mark my years or such with the investments of fashion accessories I've accumulated from bags to trinkets. So one more Jelly Kelly for lifetime. But.

I asked a gold-head, who has resisted the urge to get a Jelly Kelly, why she's not getting hooked? Its most popular fashion accessory in town. "It's not the most popular fashion accessory," she told me. Then what is, I asked. "Mine are," she said. (Why didn't I think of that?)

Bald Leo

At the Nokia Move fashion show to mark the launch of Nokia 7200, we ran into Leo Weiler. The most popular fragrance of "Miss Jaeger" is in town to take a long vacation from his time in the long morning arrested in the UK. Not guess what? Leo's shaved his pate. Now he looks like the guys. He's never looked as bald and big as now.

At another lunch we met Tanting Cruz, formerly one of Manila's best dressed who now has a flourishing law practice in New York. Visiting a host until the elections to help in her brother's campaign. But what's interesting is that she's kept her fashion dogs-home-talented clothes, designed by Auggie Cordero for her in the 80s, which we definitely can see in the Auggie Cordero Retrospective Exhibit this year.

THE SEASON'S "It" bag

LEO VEGUL, ROSINA CUNNING and PAOLA

Spa fever

MAKEOVER 911

Kristy Sadan

Prepare for the party by pampering yourself in the spa and trying weight-reducing treatments

DEPO: The spa mensch has been my latest addiction. It all started when I prepared for a big formal party where I wanted great skin and a slimmer, more toned body from head to toe. One body had started to bloat and break out from the summer heat!. There could errand this full-time regimentation and, trust me, this is only the beginning.

First encounter: I had to make sure the form-fitting dress would fit perfectly for that special day so I tried three treatments four days before the big day to make sure I could keep the bloating bloat at bay.

1. Spa Spa at The Fort for detoxification and body contour with a Seaweed Tranquility Wrap recommended 6 to 12 times total and done once or twice a week. The Greenland-source multi-exfoliation, clean a warm thermal soap that feels relaxing but sure makes you sweat. This draws out impurities and provides many elements for the body, also relieves arthritis and muscle aches and improves circulation. It lasts 90 minutes and costs P2,280.

It is best when followed with a Lymphatic drainage massage which, according to PR ad-liner Patricia Barcelon, stimulates the lymphatic system, aiding in the removal of toxins and removing the body to health by making the immune system more efficient. It would have taken another P800 and 60 minutes. I did not have time to spare so I skipped this step, but the glow of my skin and the way my clothes fit better after the session left me satisfied.

Stamina: The glow looks very now and then, the massage seems are very spacious and the rinse, relaxing smell of lemon grass will more you in the door, setting the perfect mood.

2. Intellibeauty: Recommended to me by Stella Concepcion Belen as the better way to get rid of water retentions after her pregnancy and during PMS. She worked losing 15 unwanted pounds three months after childbirth to the combination of Endermologie (be ret. tuller and body-toning) and Intellipuncture (cellulite, water retention, body contour and skin firming), which she went for every day for a full month.

Intellipuncture is offered only at their Medical Center. At the Makati branch, they gave me a thorough body and scalp first to exfoliate my skin, made me lie on a hot mat, tempered me in a steamed mask, then connected me to a body rod with electrical currents.

The mat was like a strong vibrating electric blanket, and it felt funny and energizing at first; was no way I could sleep through it. It finished with me lying on a pool of current and I measured an inch and a half less around the waist and hips with my skin sliding a lot better afterward. Cost: 95,000 per session plus P2,000 for body scrub with blush. I did not go for Endermologie as it would cost an extra P2,500 plus one time payment of P1,000 for cloudy cooking.

Do the formal day itself, people could not stop touching the skin on my arms and commenting at how flat my stomach was.

Second encounter: Face Stimulator. I discovered this place called Blue Mountains and decided to try their Bio Time facial for oily skin. My 'facial' was a half facial with extractions and mask cost 3799 plus and extra P300 for every extractions 30minutes.

Marissa, my aesthetician, was very thorough at removing all my blemishes. She steamed my face so the extractions were not so difficult, then steadily popped me. I had a lot of blemishes but did not expect the one and a half hours and my skin was perfectly smooth and mark free two days after. Owner Hank Yu said it was the tea tree that made me feel that. They cleared my pores with an electrotherapy wand that made zapping sounds on my skin without me feeling pain.

I was so inspired that I requested for the Fu Yee starter kit from the Body Shop with a cleanser, exfoliator and mattifying gel. Threw in the concealer to cover and treat facial breakouts as well. These days I use the mask twice a week to control oil and there are impurities. It's mattifying and perfect for acne-prone skin like mine. My skin maintenance plan is working so far!

Call Neo Spa at 8536222, Body Mod at 817-77-78 and Blue Mountains at 8134624.

For future subscribers only: SMS weekly beauty subscription, text JOBPY ON 234; for MMS weekly type MMSJOBPY ON 234.

Book and workshop on hair trends

ICONIC hairdressing expert Antony Whitaker lives by one philosophy in his work: "Beauty always comes first before fashion." And this is the same principle that has inspired and given focus to the works of many hairdressers worldwide.

As Schwarzkopf Professional's global ambassador, Whitaker facilitates the company's hairdressing shows and lectures and masters festival stylists worldwide.

Filipino hairdressers can get the same inspiration and expertise when Whitaker visits the Philippines for the highly anticipated Schwarzkopf Professional's Essential Looks Spring/Summer 2004 presentation to be held on April 27 at the SEDC Plaza in Makati City. Makeup of models will be by Pia Salon.

"Essential Looks" a Schwarzkopf Professional's hair fashion trend book which is considered a gem in the global hairdressing industry. The book is to architecture goals and an important source of hair fantasies and directions, providing both creative inspiration and practical know-how.

For the Spring/Summer 2004 edition, "Essential Looks" celebrates a return to glamour, and the high-maintenance, traditional notion of glamour that is wearable — hair that's pretty but continues activities with ease and chic.

"Essential Looks" subverted this by taking six key trends and reinterpreting them into commercial styles for salons worldwide. There's the edgy Fly Girl, the sassy Surf and the cowboy style Rhinestone. There's also the Flapper Girl, for those who want soaring glam, and the Catwalk, consisting of two looks of retro-down glam, the classic and urban chic.

Schwarzkopf Professional products, including the "Essential Looks" book, are distributed in the Philippines by Top Style Marketing Inc., with offices at 2328 Eisenhower Condominium, Eisenhower St., Greenhills, San Juan. Call 7232763, 7260588, 7260587 and 7260474.

ANTHONY Whitaker, Schwarzkopf Professional's global ambassador

Hair tilt winner off to Shanghai

THE year's overall champion of the Hairdressers and Cosmetologists Association of the Phils. (Hacap) hair and makeup contest will get a chance to represent Pinoy Pride in the Pacific Asia-Pacific hair competition to be held in Shanghai this October.

Hacap's 23rd National Hairstyling and Makeup competition is scheduled on April 27 at the Philippine Trade and Training Center on Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City.

Various participants from the different Hacap chapters are expected to join hands, which challenges competitive Filipino hair and makeup professionals to demonstrate their outstanding talents in the men's and ladies' coloring, hairstyling, makeup and hairstyling categories.

Models donning elegant clothes with hairstyles and makeup will also be present-ed during the day-long affair.

Call 525-6793.

LIFESTYLE

Mother Nature weaves her magic

BILLINDA has decided Mother Nature knows better as she left her garden growing much the way she found it.

Text and photos by Linda B. Bolido

THE HILLS are alive with an explosion of colors in Sagada. Or at least one particular hill is.

In a province where most houses are built a few meters—if not steps—from the sea, Belinda B. Ines's house in Barangay Cawayan, Sagada Villanueva (formerly Talubong) town, is a delightful exception. Perched atop the highest point of the town's main road, a narrow passage that stretches down to the shore, the house is a feast to the senses particularly at this time of year with the riot of colors in its sloping garden. Fuchsias, soft pinks, strawberry yellow, bold reds and brilliant whites combine for one of the most colorful sights in the island province reputed to be home to awesome and black magic practitioners.

Ines's garden does not boast of exotic and expensive plants nor did she get any help from an expert landscaper, much less a nursery. Mother Nature started all the work and Ines simply helped her along.

The provincial agricultural technician and mother of five, who is married to a musician, said when they acquired the property some four years ago, fuchsia and rubber shrubs—known as tsitsiriya to some parts of the country—were already growing profusely, almost like weeds.

Bucking the trend

Ines and family could have gone along

THE HARDY ornamental became a favorite collectible among Siquijor garden lovers.

Mother Nature weaves her magic

THOSE multicolored brightly colored plum in different shades of pink is the only rare and exotic species the Inasa have.

THE "SAMPAGUITA" plant, reportedly an import from Mexico, is considered indigenous by the Siquijodnons.

PAINT planted gumamelas and bougainvilleas to complement or contrast dramatically with the vistas.

CASSIA, like this one in full bloom, thrives well in Siquijor.

with the latest garden trends and replaced the outdoor plants with exotic Swedish. Siquijor, which the Department of Tourism hopes to make a major eco-tourism destination, has kept abreast of what is "in" among Filipino gardeners...bromeliads and euphorbias becoming all the rage one time or another. And new varieties, also as known as mother-in-law's tongues and begonias in hot-pollinated hybrids, are everywhere on the island.

But Inasa decided she did not need to follow any trends to make a distinctive garden. Instead, she decided, when they moved into their new home three years ago, to help Mother Nature along by moving some of the prolific vistas just to put some kind of order into her ready-made garden.

The distinctive new line the footpath from her house on about two-thirds of the way to the road and are spreading every which way still and may soon blanket an even wider space.

Thoughtful addition of bougainvillea shrubs, gumamela, and a few other indigenous plants that complemented or contrasted dramatically with the vistas' brilliant hues resulted in one of the most impressive sights in Siquijor.

Inasa has planted the rest of the property, particularly the portion leading to the beach with fruit trees like tangka, papaya, coconut, singcolo. The island is a major source of this popular, highly seasonal and always in short supply fruit and mango.

With its orange paint atop a hill, Inasa's house also offers a breathtaking view of the sparkling clear blue sea but, given the spread of vibrant colors in front of her, it takes a while for a visitor to appreciate what lies below.

GINGER AT tree already filled with smallgrowing green fruits

HYDRANGEAS brighten up a modest garden in another part of Siquijor.

One lucky Siquijor homeowner did not need sorcery for her enchanting garden

THE VIEW from the top looking down—of clear, calm brilliantly blue sea—is just as exhilarating as the view from below looking up.

WHITE vistas mark the steep footpath leading to the Inasa house.

Kleptomaniac or plain thief?

DEAR Tita Dulce,

My problem is my younger sister, who is 20 years old and seems to be afflicted with kleptomania.

It probably began in 2001 when money started going missing in the house. At first, the amounts involved were small change, but later bills as much as P1,000 got lost.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

Tita Dulce

When I confronted my sister, she admitted taking the money. She said she could not resist the urge, and she did not think about being caught and punished. She cried, apologized and promised not to do it again.

We all forgot about it until last year when my elder sister told me that she was missing several hundred pesos. Later my younger sister admitted to me that she took the money. Again, she apologized, and explained she just could not resist stealing the money. Something worse happened just last month: My sister was caught shoplifting a blouse.

Fortunately, the department store manager agreed to let us settle the matter. I had to pay more than a thousand pesos (six times the price of the blouse) so the store would not file a police report and have my sister's photo posted on store walls.

I can't understand why my sister gets the urge to steal. We are not poor, she's well-fed and provided for. She and my youngest sister go to college, and they get the same allowance, which the youngest swears is quite sufficient for her needs.

I fear that she would get into worse troubles. What should we do?

KUYA

Let's not jump to the conclusion that she has kleptomania. Find out first if she has costly vices—drugs, alcohol, gambling—or if she hangs out with friends with expensive tastes or habits. If she has been stealing to feed her vices, she might not have kleptomania but a simple case of financial distress.

A kleptomaniac steals purely to satisfy an impulse, not because she has any real use for the thing she takes. In contrast, a thief, or one with a criminal mind, steals because she needs the stolen good for her personal use, or to convert it to cash to pay for some vice or something she cannot steal. A kleptomaniac, of course, might later have expensive vices, but she probably acquired them only to dispose of what she stole.

If your sister has been stealing to feed some costly habits, then you could focus on eliminating those vices. If she is into drugs or alcohol, you should have her rehabilitated.

If she's into bad company, you should keep her away from them and have her undergo professional counseling. In short, you should treat her acts of stealing as a side effect of her vices. Eliminate the vices, and you eliminate the side effect.

In kleptomania, there is an urge to steal that could be the result of a serious and deep-seated psychological problem. To cure kleptomania, the hidden problem should first be eliminated.

Diagnosing a person as a kleptomaniac, as well as discovering and treating the root of the disorder, is a job for psychiatrists and not for lay people like us. So bring your sister to a psychiatrist as soon as possible.

Help your sister stay away from trouble by keeping her chaperoned when she steps out of the house. At home, keep cash and expensive easy-to-pocket-things out of sight so they would not tempt your sister.

Keep in mind that, if your sister is truly afflicted with kleptomania, she does not have a communicable disease, so don't treat her like a leper. A kleptomaniac is not a lawbreaker in the usual sense, so don't treat her like a criminal.

Above all, keep in mind that this is probably the worst time of her life—she may be most confused about herself, and may even doubt if she could love herself.

If this is how she feels, meet her confusion with understanding and erase her doubts with love.

E-mail the author at titadulce2003@yahoo.com or send letters to P.O. Box 2353, Makati CPO 1263 Makati City, or PDI office.

Top US brand now 'briefing' RP men

THE WORLD'S first manufacturer of men's briefs is now in the Philippines.

Under the $2-B Fruit of the Loom Company, BVD has been in the undergarment business for more than a hundred years. BVD stands for the initials of founders Bradley, Voorhees and Day. It started making undergarments in the United States since 1876.

Through the years, the company introduced innovations that helped put it among the top underwear producers in the US.

BVD now brings to the Philippine market some improvements and innovations in underwear manufacturing technology. It offers a wide range of quality products—from bikinis to boxers and everything in between.

Aside from briefs, BVD also makes undershirts, sleeveless shirts and tank tops using high-quality fabrics and finely woven cotton for maximum comfort.

BVD products are available at SM Department Stores in Makati City, North Edsa and Megamall, Landmark Department Store and Plaza Fair Makati.

PATRICIA Ramos-Diaz loves stiff and soft.

KRETT Eals gets close to the body.

Mobile chic

Text by Alice F. Vergara
Photos by Jim Bulan/Postcolor

RAJO Laurel

KRETT Eals

RAJO Laurel

Metro magazine and Manila's top designers come up with their spin on Nokia's stylish phone for the fashion-conscious

With numerous models available in the market, Nokia seems to have the ideal phone for everybody. Well, almost everybody.

Surprisingly, after catering to diverse groups—from camera-happy to audiophiles, from workaholics to fixation photographers—the world's leading mobile phone maker comes up only now with a sure ground for fashionistas.

The 7260, Nokia's first ever fashion phone, combines form and function with such features as a camera, full-color monitor, video recorder and built-in FM radio with hands-free speakers. It also comes with Bluetooth and infrared connectivity as well as browser and VoIP (internet) capabilities.

And unlike the popular but bulky 6600, the 7260 is compact and comes with easy interchangeable leather covers (a feature not yet in large print). Users can beef up their range of covers as the market offers a number of options beyond the rare geometric-inspired prints already found inside the Nokia box.

Much like the supermodel-covers of Nokia's older models, some are also designed the color of their 7260 to match their moods and wardrobe.

"It's a dynamic market," says Archita Bhadra, country general manager of Nokia Philippines. "As trends and tastes change, we have to give what the market wants—a fashionable phone paired with functionality."

And what better way to do it than to launch Nokia's newest phone with a recent fashion show featuring the works of four of the country's top designers as the Power Plant Mall's Plaza Garage.

Produced by Metro magazine, Nokia tapped the likes of Lulu Tan-Gan, Rhett Eala, Rajo Laurel, Patricia Ramos-Diaz and Dennis Lustico to name up with their respective takes based on the 7260's sleek design and geometric prints.

Nokia supplied designers with rolls of screen-mold mesh prints and color combinations patterned after 7260's two-tone covers.

Designers such as Tan-Gan, Eala and Ramos-Diaz combined the material with their trademark fabrics, styles and silhouettes. Lustico and Laurel grew shaping a bit, and used almost 100 percent screen mesh to come up with a number of structured pieces.

Challenging

"The fabric was quite difficult to work with because it was quite stiff," says Laurel. "I felt very strongly about using khaki fabrics for the safari look."

The designer, the famous Liberty-wherever Xiao Pierre-Mateo, also will bringing the aborigines of his recent African safari adventure. Thus, his collection, which he dubbed as the "voyager" area composed mainly of tailored pieces such as trench coats, bush jackets, safari shorts and retro-style suits.

"The mobile phone is a necessity but you don't like to lose it when you're traveling," he says. "So I wanted to translate that to the modern traveler."

Laurel even had such rare accessories as authentic safaricots, body bags, brown baseball caps and hobo bags made from the beige fabric. Very thorough!

Tan-Gan also opted for beige in fashion outfits, pants, ribbons and headbands for her avant-garde collection composed of

DENNIS Lustico

DENNIS Lustico

DENNIS Lustico goes stylish and retro.

RAJO Laurel's resort ensemble.

internal organs in fashion cards colors that draw inspiration from the colors of the 1960s and the bluesy tops of the 1980s. The collection can be summed up in one word: fun!

"I don't normally do prints," she says. "But because I enjoy designing, I welcome it as a challenge. And since knits are my forte, it's always fun to combine it with other materials."

Ramos-Diaz, who's also known for her soft and flowing lines, faced a similar challenge. She combined mesh with chiffon, layering up with a sleek, modern look inspired by the phone itself.

"I mixed the black fabric with draped jersey tops to soften it," she says. "To add more color to the clothes, I accessorized most of the pieces with bits tapes in various shades of blue, pink and fun prints."

Except for a shift dress, the fuchsia pantsuit was confined as the monday pants and shorts. A pair sported matching bags to pull the look together.

Fitted but fluid

Eala traveled in a similar method by combining black tops with printed bottoms, and vice-versa. Unlike Ramos-Diaz however, his ways mostly fitted or contained pieces (with the exception of two) in keeping, perhaps, with his training in RTW.

"I wanted to come up with something fluid," says Eala. "So I put some chine on it to soften the Nokia pattern."

The designer is referring to a diversion over tiered skirts of organdy and beaded with cut beads and sequins. His slim-fitted two-piece skirts made from strips of silk chiffon with a tail.

The evening's glamour portion belonged to Laurel's sleeveless evening gowns inspired, he says, by the "Kalibrasyon" from the 10th century. If anything, the structured and pinched numbers with drama in various forms in shoulder-length accessories resembles.

We particularly like the strapped detail on one of the models: a flat, rectangular pillow, says Laurel, was added into a fabric. Several behind-the-scene details included pin tucks, exaggerated pointies and cuffed proportions on the models' necklines.

Lustico reckons his redesigned sleeves close "I found the material still, but I eventually found a way to work around it. After all, it's still a fabric. I didn't combine it with other materials because I wanted to make it seamless and as straightforward as it is."

Unfortunately, for all the resources, the 7260 holds a current market price of P15,000 is an art-based phone. It may be designed for the art-saving fashionista, but travelling to New York or Los Angeles with it is out of the question.

"Everybody wears a different phone," says Eala, "so we had to create different phones for different segments."

For the consumer, the 7260's striking look comes will simply have to settle for such distinctions as Hong Kong, Milan and Paris.

E-mail the author at avergara@inquirer.com.ph

LIFESTYLE

Bothersome sights in boring Famas

Juliana Palermo does a Janet Jackson, Ai Ai de las Alas goes alas!, and Ara Mina does a Mega

Text by Cinche V. Munsi
Photos by Jim Guico Punzalan

WHY, why did we even bother?

Cause, we silently implored, inspirationally, cruising our sock time and again. Give to something to work on!

It was 9:30. Even by awards night standards, when big-name stars are known to show up only before their cue to go onstage, it was late.

Onstage, a miffed Ai Ai de las Alas was downing one laugha on the evening's hunt. As if to make up for the lack of unitar presence in the audience and create a foil to the rubble if still awe-inspiring midst of the gaggle of losers, The Perpetually Coiffed One herself, Imelda Marcos, the comedienne was wearing a dizzyingly glittery ruffled dress and a sparkly sunglasses... But we're not going there yet.

It was the 52nd Famas awards night and the Meralco Lee Irwin Theater at the Ateneo de Manila was decidedly filled. But after bold cracks Alvek Bitoki's controversial win last year, we already suspected the Sharon Cuneta and Marcel Soriano would be no-shows this year. Heck, even the quasi-ceremonially Paul Gabral schmeeclad Ionia Edonaico, best actress nominee like Cuneta and Soriano, was absent!

It would be highly irrational to think that the Famas decided to give trophies only to those who would show up; after all, in the night or so technical awards, we saw only one or two of the winners go up the stage. But it was also quite suspicious that, in the acting category, only the winners chose to be present. They must've known way ahead. Or, the silent assessment had been based for the case judges and.

'Fat lady'

But it's over what they say, it ain't over till the fat lady walks in.

Okay, okay, so Ara Mina is hardly what you would call fat, but we had to do a double take when we saw her chugay-cubicle-blue gown-clad form a la opera diva walk in. Only the generous show of cleavage assured us it wasn't the Mega. The sexy actress must've been going for that cooperable grownup look

CONTINUED ON C2

NOT-SO-MINI MEGA!. Perhaps in an effort to be taken seriously as an actress, Ara Mina tries to be a Mega look-alike, and asks designer Mac Cinco to wrap her all up but for half her bosom.

GAS FAS. Ai-Ai de las Alas is fancy without dressing up silly. She obviously doesn't know that.

SILLY BILLY. She has a pretty face and it's too bad, but we can't bring ourselves to like this silver dress on Angelika de la Cruz. The runner detail is just too gaudy and silly.

SHOO LACE. Who says you can't wear your curtains, sport? grandma' ito and go to the Famas? Certainly not Nikki Valdez.

ARE YOU KIDDING? It is. Angelica, or as Dina carrots Toops Sarita the Star of the Night award, it's no wonder stars don't bite after to dress up fabulously for awards nights.

IS YOUR NAME LARA? Cleptra Montalvo mimics Ms Flynn Boyle at the 2003 Golden Globes in this tube-like colorful number that looks more ridiculous than sexy.

OFF-KEY. Crowdpleasing singer Rosalia Mesa hits a bum note by dressing like dowdy dowah.

Bothersome sights in boring Famas

CIRCUS ACT. Michiko Yamamoto's next hair and neighbor's cape, are hoped Celia Rodriguez would go gift!

LOOK AT ME, LOOK AT ME! Miss Cindy Kuzma's saucy-sassy black panties and what not showing through her sheer dress, and only a sprinkling of shawl to serve as Juliana Palermo's (right) "nipple guard," chose two girls have everyone's attention.

Juday's pick of the season

THE 2004 Summer Collection combines earth colors and summer fun hues. Here designer with Gail Ann Juday in natural and summer hues flattering drapes while ruffled pieces have basic and sleek shapes. Leisure suits in browns, smoke and fresh white mirror.

YOUNG superstar Judy Ann Santos personifies the stylish and cool Pacific Blue collection.